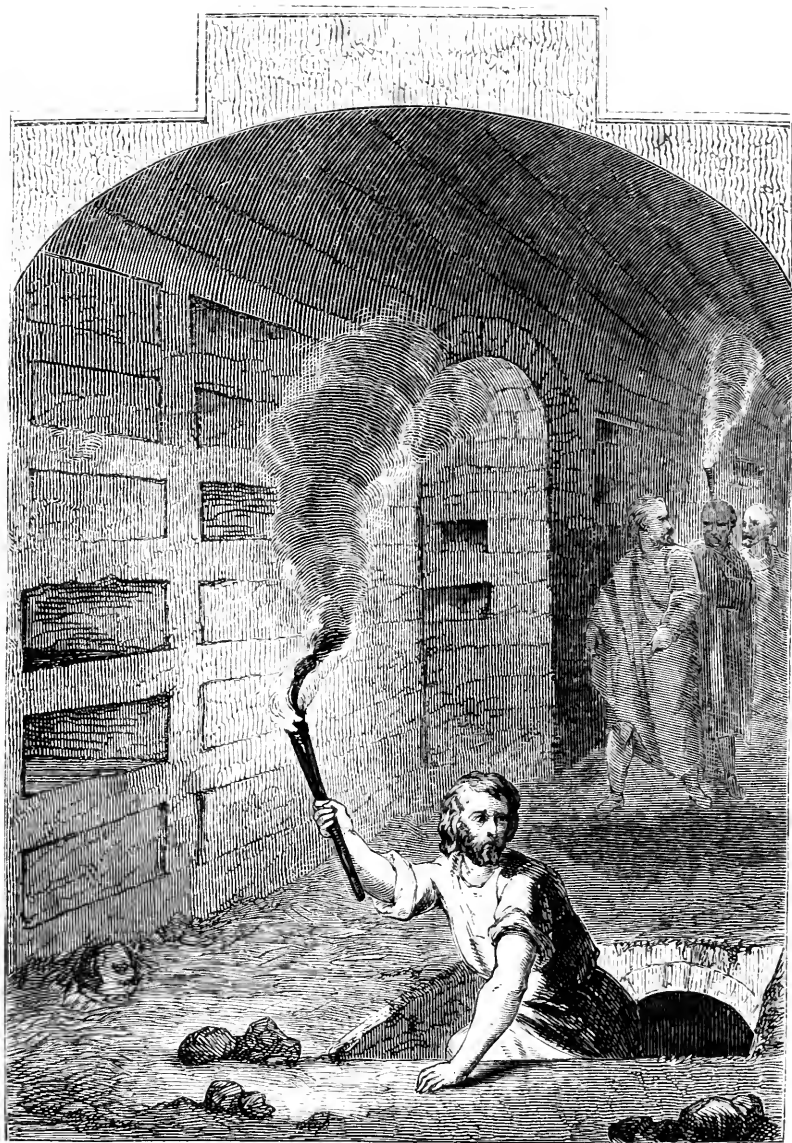




~~RR Eads~~

G. C. Adams

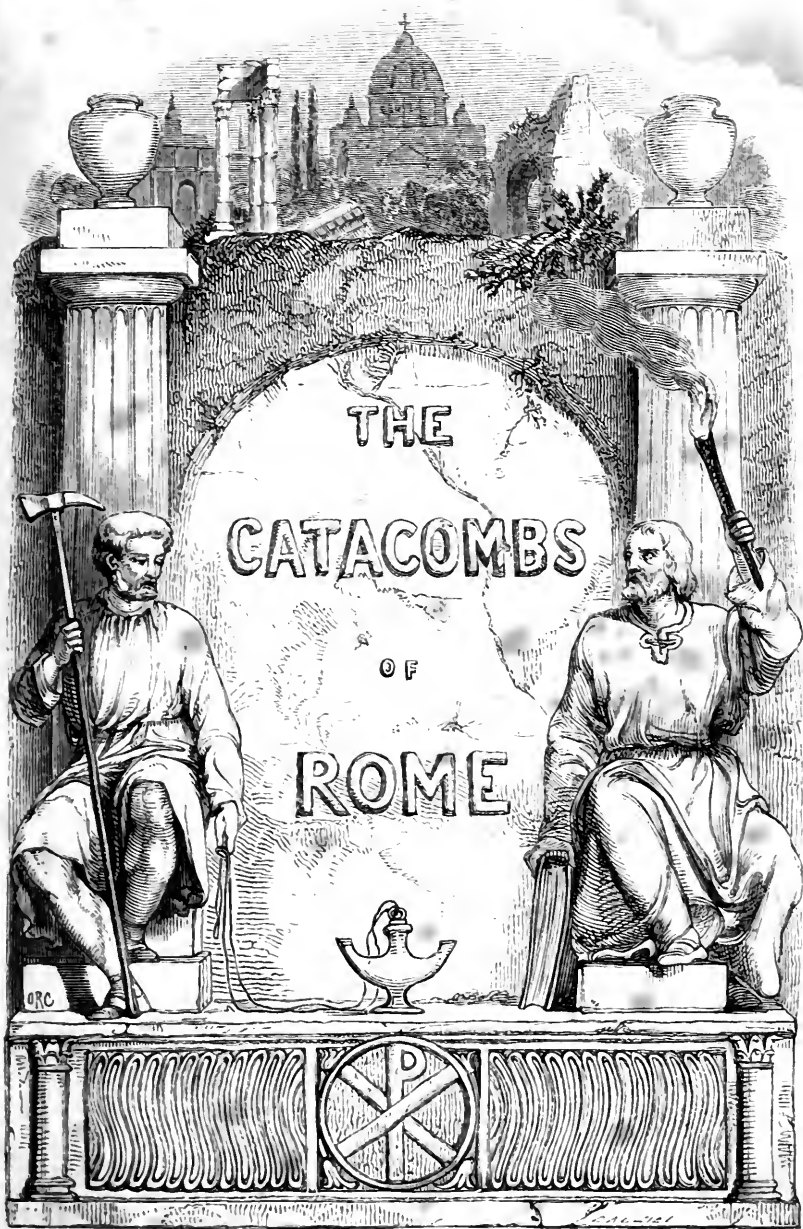
PRINTED BY
COX (BROTHERS) AND WYMAN, GREAT QUEEN STREET,
LINCOLN'S-INN FIELDS.



DR.



DR. 211

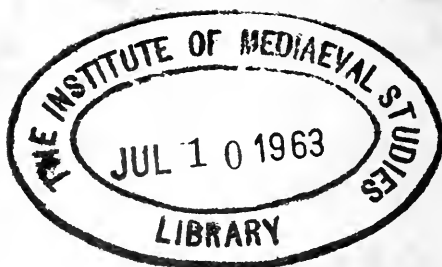


THE
CATACOMBS OF ROME.

BY
CHARLES MAC FARLANE,
Author of "History of British India," &c. &c.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS.

LONDON :
GEORGE ROUTLEDGE AND CO., FARRINGTON STREET.
1852.



24485

TO

THE REV. GEORGE CHARLES PEARSON, M.A.,
OF CHRISTCHURCH, OXFORD,

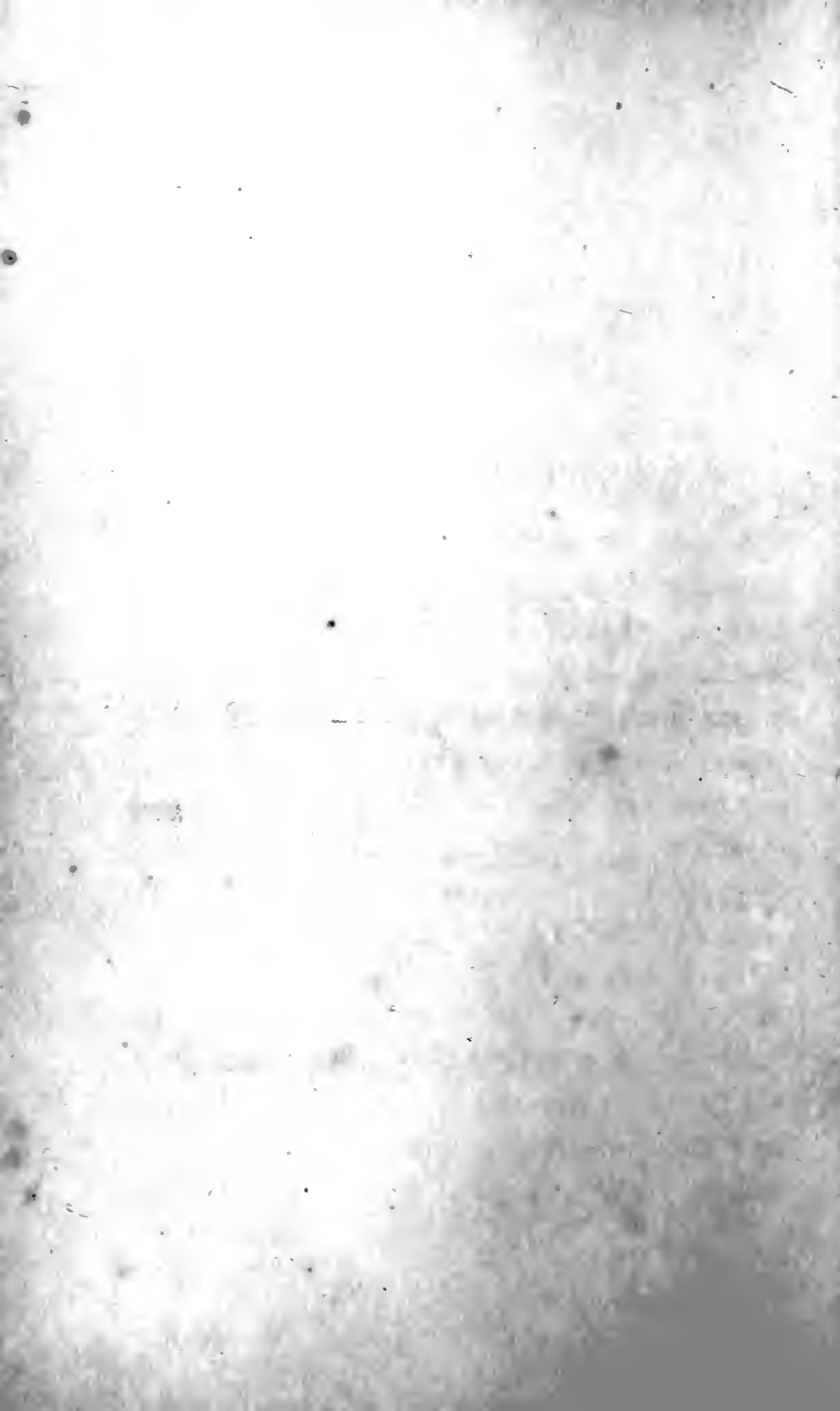
THIS BRIEF ESSAY,

WHICH, WITHOUT HIS KIND ENCOURAGEMENT, WOULD

NOT HAVE BEEN WRITTEN,

IS INSCRIBED, BY HIS SINCERE FRIEND,

THE AUTHOR.



PREFACE.

I HAVE attempted to put in a popular and attractive form a very solemn and interesting subject, closely connected with our Religion and our Church, and to condense in a few pages the most striking and important contents of many voluminous works. I have named my authorities in the text. The richest mine of catacomb literature, and that which I have most used, is the immense work of Bosio and Aringhi, "Roma Subterranea," two volumes in folio, Rome, A.D. 1651. The great work of M. Perret, the French architect, is not yet finished. For the information concerning M. Perret's extraordinary labours, and the recent discoveries made in the catacombs, which will be found in my last chapter, I have been

DG
807

4

M14

indebted to an article in the "Revue des Deux Mondes," published in September, 1851.

I trust that this little work will be received in the spirit in which it has been written. I have attempted, however weakly it may be, to foster reverential and devout sentiments; and I have carefully avoided controversial points.

I would recommend,—not my own book (except it be as an index),—but the great subject itself, to the study of English artists, sincerely entertaining, as I do, the conviction recently expressed by a German writer:—

"Art, as it now is, will never revive, will never cease to stammer in an inarticulate language, until it be again inspired by that spirit which, emanating from the fountain of Divine Truth, flows on in an incessant stream."*

C. M. F.

CANTERBURY, *April*, 1852.

* A. Reichensperger. Deutschen Volkshalle.

THE CATACOMBS.

BOOK I.

“They [the early Christians] wandered about in sheepskins and goat-skins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy :) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.”—*Epistle to the Hebrews*, xi. 37, 38.

“Simile qui con simile è sepolto.”

[Here

Like with like is buried.]

DANTE—*Inferno*, canto ix.

THE wonders of the Eternal City, varied and almost countless as they are, do not all exist on the surface of the soil or in the broad light of day. Under most of the edifices, not excluding those of very ancient date, or of the time of the republic and early empire, are substructions or parts of buildings still more ancient; and, again, beneath these are extensive excavations cut through the soil and rock,

the date of which, or of the commencement of which, is to be sought for in the remotest periods, or on the verge of the fabulous ages. Besides the outer, there is an inner world; in addition to the Rome upon the earth, there is another Rome under the earth—a *Roma Subterranea*, as it has been called in Latin by a learned writer of the seventeenth century, who could not find, in two immense folio volumes, space enough for all that this underground Rome contained and suggested.

Every one of the seven hills on which the city stood, and stands, is perforated, honey-combed, by passages, dark galleries, low corridors, and vaulted halls, where the sun never shines, and where the progress of the hours and the change of the seasons can never make themselves be felt.

“ Here like a chaos are the nights and days,
Got and brought up in the Cimmerian clime,
Where sun, nor moon, nor days, nor nights, do time.”*

The entrances into many of these gloomy labyrinths have been blocked up, or are con-

* W. Browne, *Britannia's Pastorals*, song iv. A.D. 1613.

cealed by bushes and thick-growing under-wood; others have been choked at a short distance from their mouths by *éboulemens*, or falling in of the earth above; and some are accessible, in part only, by descending through chasms which have been opened by the accidents of nature, or by the curiosity of men, who felt the earth sound hollow under their feet, and were anxious to know what the cavity might contain. A hankering after hidden treasures has been the cause of some of these openings, which descend into the subterranean chambers like the shaft of a well.

But many of these rock-hewn labyrinths are open, though none of them throughout their full extent, and have been accessible, and places of resort for religious celebrations, ever since the commencement of the sixteenth century, when the papal court, in improving the outer, found time and money to devote to the inner, Rome.

A long list of whimsical theories, and a variety of strange notions about Cimmerians, Troglodites, and other primeval people, who loathed the blessed light of the sun, and loved

darkness ; who preferred burrowing under the earth like moles to living upon it like men ; and who extended their excavations in proportion as their dim-eyed populations increased, may be passed over in silence ; and it may be safely assumed that these catacombs were originally *stone-quarries, and nothing else*. They abound not only at Rome, but at Naples, and nearly all through the south of Italy ; they are traced in Sicily, in Greece, in nearly all the Greek islands, and in Asia Minor ; and they are never found except in the vicinity of some considerable and ancient city, or near to the spot where some such city once stood.

These quarries were first opened by people who were ancient long before the first stone of the Eternal City was laid, and long anterior to what we understand by the Rome of Romulus and Remus ; this people had abiding-places and a stronghold here on the Tiber, the materials for the building of which were found at hand, and extracted by their industry and ingenuity from the bowels of the earth. The records of this remarkable race have perished, and their language, known only through in-

scriptions dug out of the earth, is a puzzle and a riddle to scholars, and a riddle not likely to be ever guessed ; but call them Cimmerians or Pelasgi, Etrurians or Etruscans (the latter being a designation by which at least a portion of them were well known to the Romans), they were indisputably a people who had, at one time, attained to a very high state of civilization, and to great perfection in the arts. The ancient Roman writers testify to the fact, and it is still further and more satisfactorily proved by their sculptures, coins, cameos, fictile vases, and other elegant objects which have been dug out of the earth, which cram the museums of Italy, which abound in the collections of all civilized Europe, and which are still being discovered under the soil in Tuscany, in the Roman states, and throughout the Neapolitan kingdom, in a number, in a variety, in a profusion, that perplexes the imagination.

The light and soft nature of the material to be quarried greatly facilitated the work, and allowed the workmen to indulge their caprice or taste, and to shape their shafts and galleries as they pleased. The principal layers which

they excavated were of soft volcanic *tufo*, or of *pozzolano*, a still softer volcanic substance. The *tufo* is cut out with little more difficulty than is required to cut an old cheese; but it hardens when employed in building and exposed for any time to sun, wind, and weather. In the quarry it will, like the well-known Maltese stone, take any shape or fashion. The *Pietra Tiburtina*, or Tiber stone, as the material near Rome is called, is quite as soft and manageable as the ordinary *tufo*. Cut it once, and it seems to invite you to return and cut again; excavate for a certain length, and you feel that there is hardly a limit to your power of excavation. This facility, and the great and long-continued demand for the material for building, may account for the number, extent, and diversity, of these quarries.

The still softer *pozzolano* is little more than rough, concrete sand, which makes a valuable, most enduring cement, when crushed and mixed with water, and with pounded shells, or a little lime. The old Romans called the pits where it was dug *arenaria*, or sand-pits. The *arenaria* are mentioned by various ancient writers.

When the Romans began to erect temples to their gods, forums and other places for public discussion and the transaction of business; when they began to change their clay and wicker huts, thatched with straw and the broad rushes of the Tiber (dwellings not dissimilar to those they found in Britain eight hundred years afterwards), for solid stone houses, the demand for the staple building material was greatly augmented. These early artisans and builders of Rome appear to have been nearly all taken out of the remnant of the Etruscan population. The Tarquin kings drew their masons, architects, and quarrymen out of Etruria (now Tuscany); and the arts of these people, though evidently on the decline before the period of the Roman settlement, served their proud, warlike, but barbarous successors as the first basis on which to erect arts of their own. The *cloacæ*, or sewers, which drained the whole city for more than seven hundred years, and of which stupendous remains are yet seen, were principally the works of these excavating, hard-working Etrurians. They were begun by Tarquin the Elder, and finished by Tarquin the Proud. They ran

all under the city, and opened on the Tiber ; and even when Rome was in its “most high and palmy state”—a city of temples, theatres, amphitheatres, and marble-encrusted palaces—they continued to be one of her greatest wonders and boasts, while the salubrity they conferred on the place was above all price. Pliny, in his hyperbolical manner, says that by these stupendous subterraneans it seemed as if Rome were suspended between heaven and earth.

“The things,” exclaims Dio Halicarnassus, who wrote in the Augustan age, “that most struck me with the magnificence of Rome, were the aqueducts, the public ways, and the *cloacæ*.”

After the second Punic war, when the republic was waxing wealthy, and extending her conquests in all directions, the requisitions made upon the quarries, and all the deposits of building materials, became immense. Besides public and private buildings in the city, circuses, palaces, theatres, thermæ, etc., bridges were thrown across the Tiber ; aqueducts across the Campania, or wide, vast plains round Rome ;

and quays were built along either bank of the river for the distance of miles ; while, here and there, immense ramparts were raised to keep the stream within its bed, and to prevent those inundations which had often been so very destructive. Other works of great magnitude were carried on lower down, and at the mouths of the river ; and barges and enormous rafts were constantly floating down to Ostia, with quarried tufo and pozzolano for the fortifications, quays, harbour, and lighthouse. To furnish this supply, new side-galleries, and crypts, underneath those which previously existed, were opened, and the quarries were lengthened.

When the long civil wars ended in the subversion of the republic and the establishment of the empire, the demand for building materials became even more extensive than ever. Under Augustus the aspect of Rome was changed, and the greater part of the city rebuilt. Work them as they would, the quarries near at hand could not supply material enough, and others were opened at considerable distances, or miles from the banks of the Tiber. In one place or another this process of crypt-

digging, or of excavating for the volcanic stone, was continued under the twelve Cæsars, and down to the period of the decline of the empire, when the Romans (like the Turks and other people in *decadence*) left off quarrying, and destroyed old edifices in order to obtain materials for erecting new ones.

No ancient writer, of whom the works are extant, has left us a description of these immense quarries, or of the uses to which they were applied when they were no longer worked. Antiquarians of the modern ages have been able to collect only a few ancient allusions to these crypts. That some of them, or recondite portions of them, were used as places of sepulture by the Etrurians, who first dug them, there can be very little doubt ; for that people, as proved by the discovery of innumerable graves and sarcophagi, were accustomed rather to bury than to burn their dead. There is also direct testimony as well as induction to show that the Romans buried many of their corpses. Incremation was always expensive ; during the later years of the republic, and for a very long time under the empire, the funeral pile, with its

oil, its incense, its cinnamon, and precious spices, and its elaborate ceremonies, cost such sums as could be afforded only by the wealthy. From the beginning, and through all periods, the Romans appear to have consigned the mortal remains of their slaves and their poor to the river, to the earth, or to the quarries, the great deposit of the last kind being under the Esquiline Hill. Here were interred the poor slaves, people of servile condition, and criminals who had suffered the last penalty of the law; and here, on or under the Esquiline Mount, birds of prey are represented as flocking to devour the dead bodies. Horace says, "This was the common sepulchre of the miserable plebeians;" and Propertius seems to allude to the Esquiline *caverns* when he says that that mount was destined to the lowest classes of the people.

The number of the interments must have been very great. In the time of the emperor Augustus, when Mecænas built a villa and laid out pleasant gardens on the Esquiline, Horace praised him in verse for having restored salubrity to that infectious part of Rome, and

for having concealed the corpses and skeletons, which lay in heaps under the mount.

“Huc prius angustis ejecta cadavera cellis
 Conservus vili portanda locabat in arcâ.
 Hoc miseræ plebi stabat commune sepulcrum,
 Pantolabo scurræ, Nomentanoque nepoti.

* * * * *

Nunc licet Esquiliis, habitare salubrius, atque
 Aggere in aprico spatium ; quo modo tristes
 Albis informem, spectabant ossibus agrum.”*

[Formerly dead bodies, thrown out of narrow cells, were carried here by fellow-slaves on a wretched bier. This was the general sepulchre of the vilest of the people ; of Pantolabus the buffoon, and Nomentanus the debauchee. * * * But now the air of the Esquiline, rendered salubrious, admits of dwelling-houses and sunny walks ; and ground, lately hideous with white bones, is changed into a garden.]

To contain all the dead slaves and “vile plebeians,” in the time of Augustus, large spaces must have been required, however much the bodies were huddled together. Many of the rude inscriptions, designs, or scrawls, found in the crypts, have nothing to do with Christianity, and were evidently set where they are before the introduction of our faith.

* Satir. i. viii.

It is also clear that these dark mysterious labyrinths were frequented by robbers, and resorted to as hiding-places, by the defeated and proscribed, in times of trouble and civil war. Even some of the chiefs of the fallen Girondin faction found a refuge in the caverns and stone-quarries of St. Emilian, from the fury of Robespierre and his sanguinary Jacobins. Indeed, there is a most striking resemblance between the proscriptions of Marius and Sylla, and those of the first great French revolution, as there is also in the means adopted by the Romans at one period, and the French at the other, to conceal themselves, and escape the search of their pitiless enemies. In either case, no place was too vile or foul for resort, if it afforded a chance of concealment,—even the *cloacæ* had their tenants.

Horace peoples the Esquiline crypts with sorcerers as well as robbers. He makes the God of Gardens say,—“The birds and thieves that were wont to hover round this place were not half so troublesome to me as those pestilent, sorcerers, who seek by their enchantments and poisons to work on the minds of men. Nor is

it in my power to drive them away, or hinder them, when the moon shows her sweet face, from gathering bones and poisonous herbs. * * The spot is filled with serpents and infernal dogs; and the moon, blushing, hides herself among the tombs, not to be a witness of these abominations.”*

In one of Cicero's orations—*pro Cluentio*—the greatest of Roman advocates says, that a certain Asinius, being tempted out of the city of Rome on pretext of being conducted to some gardens beyond the suburbs, was dragged into the quarries near the Esquiline gate and was there secretly murdered. It was probably to prevent similar atrocities, and to bar out the robbers, that the Romans built up the entrances into several of these caverns with solid masonry, although there are traditions which say that the walls were erected to shut in some of the earliest Christians, and to cause them to die by the horrible death of famine, after they should have incurred the guilt of cannibalism.

* Satir. i. viii.

When the insane, furibund tyrant Nero was hurled from his throne, as "the common enemy and fury of mankind,"* when the senate and his successor, Galba, decreed that he should be dragged naked through the streets of Rome, whipped to death, and then thrown over the Tarpeian rock, he was advised by Phaon, his attendant, to flee for refuge to some subterranean quarry near at hand; but the monster protested that he could not bury himself alive.†

This seems to be the last allusion made by the classical writers to these extensive excavations.

According to Romish legends, some of the earliest Christians were confined in the catacombs in the time of the emperor Nero, and both St. Peter and St. Paul lived in them; and the body of St. Peter was buried in one of the crypts, and lay there many years before it was conveyed into the city, deposited in the spot where it now is, and over which, after an interval of many ages, the present stupendous

* Pliny.

† Suetonius, in Life of Nero, 48.

dome of St. Peter's Church was erected. But critics and keen investigators of the reformed churches have found reason to doubt whether St. Peter, in the flesh, was ever at Rome at all. I prefer the legend to the controversy, but I cannot discover any contemporary account in profane history of even the presence at Rome of St. Paul. It is certain, however, that St. Paul was at Rome at this time, as it also is that, although only about thirty years after our Saviour's death at Jerusalem, the number of Christians was very great at Rome. The persecution of Nero, A.D. 64-5 (the first which the followers of the new faith suffered under the Roman emperors), has been described by Tacitus, and alluded to by Suetonius and by Juvenal. The great classical historian, who was living in the time of Nero, may himself have been a witness of the horrible scenes he describes; Juvenal was contemporary with Tacitus, and Suetonius wrote in the same age.

Every reader of history will remember, that the tyrant Nero was suspected of having given orders, and prepared the means, for that terrible

conflagration which reduced a large portion of the city of Rome to cinders and ashes.

“To put an end to this report,” says Tacitus, “Nero laid the guilt, and inflicted the most cruel punishments, upon a set of people who were held in abhorrence for their crimes, and called, by the vulgar, *Christians*. The founder of that name was Christ, who suffered death in the reign of Tiberius, under his procurator Pontius Pilate. This pernicious superstition, thus checked for a while, broke out again, and spread not only over Judea, where the evil originated, but through Rome also, whither everything bad upon the earth finds its way, and is practised. Some, who confessed their sect, were first seized, and afterwards, by their information, a vast multitude were apprehended, who were convicted, not so much of the crime of burning Rome, as of hatred to mankind. Their sufferings at their execution were aggravated by insult and mockery; for some were disguised in the skins of wild beasts, and worried to death by dogs; some were crucified; and others were wrapped in pitched shirts, and

set on fire, when the day closed, that they might serve as lights to illuminate the night. Nero lent his own gardens for these executions, and exhibited at the same time a mock Circensian entertainment, being a spectator of the whole, in the dress of a charioteer, sometimes mingling with the crowd on foot, and sometimes viewing the spectacle from his car."

This frequently quoted passage makes it sufficiently clear that the Christians were despised and hated by the proud Romans. They followed an entirely new, and (to their persecutors) an unintelligible creed; and although they were bound not to hate but to cherish mankind, and to love their neighbours as themselves, the abominations of idolatry which they witnessed, and the insults and oppressions to which they were subjected, drove them into solitude, and induced them to live as much as possible by themselves. The picture drawn of them by Suetonius is scarcely more favourable than that of Tacitus: this writer seems to accuse them of magical arts, for the word *maleficæ*, which he uses in describing their new superstition, may be translated either by our

word *mischievous* or by the word *magical*, although it certainly most frequently bears the signification of *magical*.

It has been rationally supposed that this magic, and the sullenness and gloom so contrary to the real spirit of Christianity, may have been attributed to these early professors, in good measure, on account of the dark and mysterious labyrinths in which they performed their religious services, and in which many of them may have had a voluntary or a compulsory abode. Pale Canidia, and her grim companion old Sagana, and the other sorceresses, at whom Horace but laughed, were beings of reality and exceeding great dread to the Roman populace: the spots they haunted by the light of the blushing moon, were the catacombs, and *there* the Christians—no doubt, often by night—met in cautious silence, and worshipped. As they would not sacrifice to any of the innumerable false gods of Rome, the Romans would not permit them to worship in public, or in the light of day, the one true God; and having rendered themselves obnoxious to the common people, among whom they

had been living, and from whom they had nearly all sprung, they might well be expected, without decree of senate or emperor, or any other governmental measure, to be anxious to withdraw themselves from public observation, and, as much as was possible, to seclude themselves, and to live only to themselves and for their faith, though it were in the bowels of the earth. The popular superstition of the Romans would keep away intruders. The total absence of dates in their early epitaphs and inscriptions prevents any positive decision as to the time when they first began to bury their dead in the crypts ; but there can be little doubt that the practice commenced as soon as they were driven to worship and to live underground. Although some few of their first converts were persons eminent in rank—and among them were ladies who supported tortures, and underwent death for the Truth—the teachers of the Gospel at Rome, like the Apostles of our Lord in Palestine, Syria, and Asia Minor, looked for their proselytes chiefly in the inferior classes, or among the poor and lowly of the land. The glad tidings they had to convey were as attrac-

tive as they were novel to the serfs and cruelly oppressed poor, who formed so vast a portion of the old empires of the earth as well as of the ancient commonwealths or republics, which we have been accustomed to praise for their passionate love of liberty and hatred of tyrants: the glad tidings were gladdest of all to the hearts of "hereditary bondsmen," who could scarcely call their lives their own in this world, and who, assuredly, had never a glimpse or a hope of that better world wherein all odds are made even, and "the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest." It is conjectured that some of the very first converts at Rome were poor slaves and men who gained a hard and scanty livelihood by working in the quarries and burrowing in the earth. Their frequentation of the crypts would bring the preachers of the Word into contact and acquaintanceship with these people; and it was precisely to such a class, or to such an unhappy condition of men, that the Saviour of the world would have addressed himself in preference to any other. Numerous little figures and symbols, found on the walls of the crypts, and

in front of the narrow and crowded tombs, seem to refer to these early and lowly converts. One of the commonest figures, and one that has been discovered in nearly all these quarries, is that of a man carrying a pickaxe on his shoulder, and wearing the short tunic and very scanty dress of a slave employed in excavation.

Thus rapidly were realized the foretellings of our Saviour. There had been, before the days of Nero, many minor persecutions, proceeding, not from the commandment or will of government, but from the intolerance and hatred of the unbelievers; but this first imperial persecution took place in little more than thirty years after our Saviour's death, and whilst some of his own immediate disciples were living. Had not Jesus said to those disciples:—"They shall deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake."* "They shall lay hands on you, and persecute you."† "The time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto

* Matt. xxiv. 9.

† Luke xxi. 12.

you, because they have not known the Father, nor me. But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them.”*

The blood of martyrs was the fructifying seed of the church: the more the Christians were persecuted, the more rapidly did they increase in numbers as well as in courage. Under the Emperor Domitian, in little more than a quarter of a century after the death of Nero, and not half a century after the first promulgation of the Gospel by our Saviour, not only Rome, but all the neighbouring cities of Italy abounded with Christians,† who were ever ready to denounce the sin of idolatry and

* John xvi. 2-4.

† Their increase in Eastern Europe, and along the coasts of Asia Minor, must have been equally rapid. A few years later, Pliny the Younger found that in his province of Bithynia alone, the Christians were countless. “So very many,” wrote he to the emperor, “there are of all classes and all states and conditions, both men and women, and many more are likely to be hereafter.” See, in Pliny’s Epistles, the celebrated letter to Trajan, wherein the writer relates, that he had put two Christian deaconesses to the torture without being able to extract from them any confession of the crimes and monstrosities with which their sect was charged.

the outrageous vices of the times. They may still have frequented the crypts under the Esquiline Hill, and their other subterranean recesses, for the performance of their worship, or, in smaller or in larger parties, for temporary concealment from the enemies they made; they certainly still went thither to inter their dead, but, as a community, they dwelt no longer in the catacombs. They were too numerous, and far too widely extended for that.

It was under the cruel, brutal Domitian, who caused himself to be called "God and Lord," that the second great persecution took place, in A.D. 95. Other massacres followed in the reigns of Trajan, Adrian, and Severus. But under the mild successors of Severus there was a calm, which lasted from A.D. 197 to A.D. 235; and, during these thirty-eight years, the Christians, who had hitherto been compelled to worship in sequestered places, or, at best, in private houses, were allowed to build churches and humble oratories in Rome and other cities innumerable. The next persecution took place under Maximinus, the crowned boor from Thrace, A.D. 235. Fifteen years later, Decius,

the fierce barbarian from Pannonia, who had revolted against his master and made himself emperor, rekindled the fire, which is said to have blazed more furiously and to a wider extent than ever it had done before.

The Diocletian persecution—commonly called the *tenth* and *last* of the great persecutions of the Church under the emperors—was intended to extirpate the new faith, and to drown it in its own blood. It commenced A.D. 303, at Nicomedia, in Asia Minor, where the emperor then held his court; and was provoked by the jealousies and fears of the unbelievers at the vast and still rapidly increasing numbers of the worshippers of Christ. The churches were broken open, the Scriptures were seized and burned, and a decree went forth, that every Christian temple within the limits of the empire should be demolished to its very foundation. From Nicomedia the persecution extended to Sardes, to Pergamus, to Smyrna, and all the Seven Churches, to all parts of Asia Minor, Syria, Palestine, Egypt, and the African coast; and, from the same original centre, it reached Byzantium (now Constantinople), Thessalonica,

Athens, Corinth, and Rome. If, under fear or torture, apostates were made, death was braved by many thousands, and by people in masses. In an unnamed town in Phrygia the inhabitants, at the approach of the unconverted troops of the emperor, threw themselves into their strong church: the soldiers set fire to the edifice; but still the Christians would not come forth or utter one word of recantation, and—men, women, and children—they were all burned alive, and buried under the ruins and ashes of their temple. In other places, the issues from the streets occupied by the Christians were barricaded and quite blocked up, and the houses were set on fire, and burned with all in them; in others, the believers were bound together with ropes, and were cast or driven into the sea by hundreds.

In Italy alone, the number of believers had so increased by this time, that the destruction of them made a visible and fearful void in the population. Villages, towns, boroughs, and great cities, are described as being strewed, and in places filled, with their dead bodies. From the Tiber to the Straits of Messina on

the one side, and to the foot of the Alps on the other, there were probably few places but had their martyrs at this sad time. These were days for the Christians to flee again to deserts, and to dens, and to caves in the earth, and to call upon the crags of the mountains to topple over and hide them.

Diocletian had little to do in the execution of his own terrible orders, for, having issued his decrees, he abdicated, and withdrew to his humble native place on the coast of Dalmatia, to cultivate with his own hands his orchard and garden. But the execution of his decrees was enforced by his successors ; the persecution was continued, with more or less fury, during the space of ten years, and it did not altogether cease until the reunion of the empire under Constantine, the first Christian emperor, upwards of twenty years after the issuing of Diocletian's decree at Nicomedia. Yet, in this terrible interval, the progress of the Church appears to have been far more rapid than it had been at any preceding period. For one martyr that expired, ten or twenty converts were made, and each new proselyte taught his

faith to his family and to others ; while ordained priests, and intrepid missionaries, fearless of the perils which might await them, travelled from town to town, preaching, and administering the Eucharist, and, among them, they traversed every part of the world that yet acknowledged the dominion of Rome. The great, the wealthy, the learned of the time, came in, and were baptized now. The heathenism in which they had been suckled had indeed become “ a creed outworn ; ” they had no belief or hope in it. To the educated classes the ancient mythology had become a theme for derision and laughter. The old faith being dead, there was nothing left to choose but the religion of Christ, or no religion at all. The absence of a belief is in itself an inward moral death. Man ever wants those “ glimpses which will make him less forlorn.” Philosophy could not afford those glimpses ; for even Plato, like every sage unaided by revelation, left the immortality of the soul as a *grand peut-être*—a great perhaps, or may be.

Gibbon and other writers seem to have over-

looked this yearning of the human heart for some fixed belief, as also the rapidly-spreading conversions of the third, and the earlier part of the fourth century; and their calculation that, before the important conversion of Constantine the Christians did not form more than a twentieth part of the subjects of the Roman empire, is assuredly incorrect. It is far more probable that they formed at least one-third of the population, while the remaining two-thirds were mostly in a frame of mind singularly adapted to the facile reception of new, startling, and consoling truths. Otherwise, how could the establishment of the Church, as the Church of the whole empire, have been so rapid and so tranquil? Imperial decrees and persecutions had never yet overturned a belief, however false and unfounded. The will of Constantine and his ministers could no more have forced Christianity upon an unwilling, unprepared people, than the fiat of Julian the Apostate, some forty years later, could drive the people from Christianity back to idolatry.

But the first effects, in Italy, of the Diocletian persecution were dreadful in the extreme. The

loud, furious pagans “raised a strain above Lucifer, and a project beyond the primary wickedness of hell.”* They appear to have contemplated nothing less than the extermination of the believers, and to have racked their invention for new modes of torture and death. The accounts of some of the early Roman martyrologists are too dreadful to be perused: of them we may verily say, “As there are many relations whereto we cannot afford our assent, so are there divers others whose verities we fear, and heartily wish there were no truth in them.”†

After this atrocious visitation, the remnant of the Christian family retired to woods and wilds, to the uppermost valleys and glens of the country between Rome and Naples, which is now called the Abruzzi, and to other most inaccessible parts of the Apennine chain of mountains; while some of them may have once more sought concealment and the means of living in the quarries by the Tiber. It also

* Sir Thomas Browne. *Vulgar Errors*, book vii.

† *Id. Id.*

appears to be more than probable, that some of them were condemned to work as slaves in those excavations, and that of these a good part died there, and were buried where they died. Even at this early period, means must also have been found to convey thither the mangled remains of Christian martyrs, and to distinguish their tombs from the many and constantly increasing multitude of common sepulchres, by monograms and graven emblems of martyrdom.

But the tree of indestructible root put forth new shoots, which rapidly grew into lofty stems and far-extending branches. Persecution succeeded to persecution; but the result was always the same. Blood gave fertility to that soil, and shortly after each devastation, the crop was thicker than ever. Every persecution contributed its stock of saints and martyrs to the subterranean tombs; and the catacombs, gradually enlarged by the Christians, assumed the character of a *terra sancta*, a holy land, inferior in sanctity only to Mount Calvary, and the spot which had contained the tomb of Christ. When Constantine embraced the cross, struck down the gods of Greece and Rome, and

changed the religion of the empire, these dark crypts were regarded as centres of light and holy inspiration. They were frequented by the great and powerful, who took a pride, and believed that they gained a spiritual benefit, in decorating the tombs of the proto-martyrs and first confessors, and in clearing out and cleansing those vast recesses of the dead.

“In the year 314, a Christian emperor gave to the Church as her right those caverns which had so long been her refuge. Now commenced a new use of the catacombs. Where the Christians had formerly gone to preserve life, where they had laid the remains of their kindred, where their honoured martyrs lay awaiting the coming of their Lord, and where all the traditions of their past history had their most hallowed associations, they naturally betook them to meditate. Nor is there one of us who would not have loved to stand and muse in those dormitories of the faithful dead. We feel even as to the spot where we have buried one friend,—the spot where we have looked down into an open grave, till we felt as if our own heart were at its bottom, and growing

cold,—that we should love to go there again and meditate. And if so, how strongly would the Christians of Rome be drawn toward the tombs of their fathers in the faith, toward the scenes of saintly patience and glorious martyrdom! * * * * Here they were wont not only to meditate individually, but also to meet, especially round the tombs of martyrs, to celebrate the love-feast or *agape*, and even to partake of the Eucharist. This practice naturally, and perhaps inevitably, led to abuses.”*

Many of the inscriptions and works of art which we see in the crypts are referable to the period of Constantine, or to that of his immediate successors. Christians who could no longer dread the tortures or bear the palm of martyrdom, enjoined that they should be buried in this *Terra Sancta*. Popes, prelates, kings, queens, emperors, empresses, the highest in rank, and the most devout in life, or most penitent in death, were for some centuries interred in these crypts, in the vicinage of the tombs of Etruscan pagans, Roman slaves and

* The Church in the Catacombs; a Lecture. By the Rev. William Arthur. Lond. 1850.

criminals, Christian labourers and hewers of stone, and Christian martyrs. Even from the remote parts of Europe, bodies of illustrious personages were carried thither for sepulture, as, a few centuries later, princes and nobles commanded in their wills that their bodies, or at least their hearts, should be carried to Palestine, and buried in the Holy Land. The following are a few of the names of the illustrious dead who were inhumed in the Roman catacombs in the course of the dark ages :—

Anacletus, fifth pope or bishop of Rome.

Pope Leo I.

Pope Gregory the Great, who first undertook the conversion of our Anglo-Saxon ancestors.

Popes Gregory II. and III.

Pope Leo IX.*

The Emperor Honorius.

The Emperor Valentinian.

The Emperor Otho II.

Cedwalla, a king of the Western Saxons.

Conrad, a king of the Mercians.

* The pontificate of Leo IX. lasted from A.D. 1049 to 1055. He appears to have been the last pope that was buried in the catacombs.

Offa, a Saxon king.

Ina, a king of the Anglo-Saxons, with Queen Eldiburga, his wife.

The Princess Mary, daughter of Stilicho, and wife of the Emperor Honorius.

The Empress Agnes.

The unfortunate Charlotte, queen of Cyprus.

The celebrated Countess Matilda, who lived in the twelfth century, and added to the wealth, and vastly increased the territorial possessions of the Roman See.*

Most of these personages were interred long after the last of the persecutions. But while the persecutions prevailed, the afflicted Christians accounted it one of their greatest calamities to be excluded from the catacombs. An inscription discovered in one of the crypts under the Apennine Way (of which further mention will be made hereafter), contains these words,—

“O tempora infausta, quibus inter sacra et vota, ne in cavernis quidem salvari possumus! Quid miserius vitâ! sed quid miserius in morte, cùm ab amicis et parentibus sepeliri nequeant!”

* In this enumeration, the list has been followed of the Abbé Gaume. See “Les Trois Romes,” vol. iv. p. 39.

[O unhappy times, in which we cannot so much as find a refuge in caverns, amongst sacrifices and prayers ! What can be more miserable than life ! and what more miserable than death, since we are forbidden to be buried among our friends and relatives !]

The irruptions of the barbarians, which followed so closely upon the establishment of Christianity as the religion of the state, were very fatal to Rome, to her churches, to her holy places of all kinds, and to her works of art. Attila and his savage Huns respected nothing, whether sacred or profane. Totila, when he had captured the city, and had firmly seated himself on the throne of Italy, distinguished himself by his gentleness, humanity, and other virtues ; but while he was pressing his long siege of Rome, his Goths were as destructive as the Huns had been before them. They broke open the catacombs, and ransacked vast numbers of the graves in a truly barbarous search after hidden treasures. These Goths were, in their turn, accused of practising the black arts and dealing in magic, the Romans affirming that there were magicians among them, to point out the spots where gold and silver and gems lay buried. The Goths were followed by the

Lombards, and these by the Saracens and other devastators. After each of the spoliations, devastations, and desecrations of these barbarians, the catacombs were neglected for a season. There was no more burying in the crypts, no more service in the chapels, no more baptizing at the fonts, in the baptisteries. The void chasms were left to bats and obscene birds and beasts, to runaway debtors, thieves, and banditti. It was in dread, or only in singing Ave or Salve, or in chanting a psalm or hymn, that the peasants, gathered in caravans, passed the mouths of the caverns under the Esquiline Mount, to or from the market-places of Rome.

Under the popes of the middle ages, or from the eleventh to the end of the fourteenth century, when there was scarcely any law or government at Rome, and when an anarchy, now created by the unruly populace, and now by the factious nobles, prevailed with scarcely any intermission, ancient tombs, on the face of the earth, were turned into fortresses;* and

* The traveller will remember the beautiful circular mausoleum, a little beyond the circus of Caracalla, built by the wealthy Crassus, in honour of his wife, Cecilia Metella. It

the catacombs under the earth were frequently applied to the worst uses. Plots and conspiracies were hatched in their dark recesses, and armed insurgents assembled therein to wait for reinforcements from the neighbouring towns and villages, and for the fierce banditti from the mountains. Writing at this period, the immortal Dante exclaims,—

“Romagna tua non è, e non fu mai,
Senza guerra ne’ cuor de’ suoi tiranni.”

[Never was thy Romagna without war
In her proud tyrants’ bosoms, nor is now.]

There were in fact about half as many wars as there were towns, or great barons; and not only the capital city, but every district, every corner of the Roman states, was wasted by fire and sword. In the long contest between the great and most ancient families of the Colonna and the Ursini, combats took place between their several vassals and partisans on the Esqui-

was battlemented and turned into a fortress by the Gaietani, one of the great feudal families of that lawless period. Other tombs underwent the same conversion. The immense mausoleum of the Emperor Adrian (now Castel Sant’ Angelo) had been turned into a fortress long before, by Belisarius.

line Mount and in the caverns beneath; the awfulness of the spot, the dread presence of the dead, and the emblems of religion, imposing no respect on the furious combatants. When Sciarra Colonna took Pope Boniface by the beard in the garden of his own palace, and impiously made him a prisoner, he had previously called down from the mountains of the Abruzzi, and his other fiefs and castles on the Apennines, bands of fierce retainers, who arrived in small parties, to prevent suspicion; who concealed themselves until the moment for action; and who then issued from the *souterrains* in irresistible force. The social condition of the eternal city was not improved when (A.D. 1308) the pontiff was driven from it by the turbulence of the people, and the papal seat was removed for seventy years from the banks of the Tiber to the banks of the Rhone—to the castellated heights of the old city of Avignon in Provence. The splendour of the court and church (and there had been much splendour in the midst of all that anarchy) was obscured, the papal revenues, the streams of wealth which had flowed to Rome, were diverted into other

channels; accordingly all classes suffered in their several degrees: the poor became poorer; the wicked and the desperate still more desperate; all public works were neglected; the country was inundated; the stagnant waters, mixed with decomposing vegetable matter, evaporated under the intense summer sun; and the whole neighbourhood and the city itself became unhealthy, and a prey to the demon of malaria. Petrarca, in imploring the popes to return from Avignon, scarcely exaggerated the woes of Rome:—

“ Or dentro ad una gabbia
 Fere salvagge, e mansuete gregge
 S’ annidan sì, che sempre il miglior geme.”*

[Shut close as in one cage are wild beasts and gentle flocks, crowded together in such sort that the best always moan.]

In vain the poet exclaimed,—

“ Io vo gridando pace, pace, pace !”†
 [I go shouting peace, peace, peace !]

There was to be no peace at Rome in his day. Bears, wolves, lions, eagles, serpents, columns,

* Canzone xxix.

† Id.

or men fighting under those family ensigns, and as fierce, rapacious, cunning, and hard as the realities of those emblems, kept up a constant war, scarcely respecting even the Truce of God. At this period, perhaps more than at any other, devastation and ruin fell upon the splendid remains of ancient Rome.

“Vain end of human strength, of human skill,
Conquest, and triumph, and domain, and pomp.”*

The mouths of more of the catacombs were closed up by the exterior accumulation of sand and soil, by the falling in of the tufo and earth over the arches, or by the rapid growth of gigantic weeds, dense bushes, and trees. The most of them seem to have been forgotten as holy places, rich in the tombs and relics of saints and martyrs. During the two revolutions effected by that extraordinary reformer Cola di Rienzi, who began well, but went mad through success and excess of power, some of the crypts are again mentioned as places of muster and concealment; and it is said by an old chronicler, that when the final hour of the tribune

* Dyer. “The Ruins of Rome.”

of the people—now a sanguinary tyrant—had sounded, and he must flee from Rome or perish there, he was advised by a friend to take temporary refuge in one of the catacombs, and replied, as Nero had done thirteen hundred years before him, that he would not bury himself alive. But the incident is not mentioned by any contemporary writer, or by the best historians of those troublous times, and the story may probably have been suggested for the sake of the comparison between the fierce tribune and the worst of the Roman emperors.

In this age we hear of some of the catacombs being occupied at certain seasons by shepherds and their flocks, and by herdsmen and their herds, but their more common residents appear to have been robbers and felons.

“Quasi spelunca di ladron son fatti,
Tal, ch' à buon solamente uscio si chiude ;
E tra le altari, e tra le statue ignude,
Ogni impresa crudel par che si tratti.”*

[They are become like robbers' caves, so that only the good are denied entrance ; and among altars and saintly statues, every cruel enterprise seems to be concerted.]

* Petrarca, canzone xi.

The papal seat was restored to Rome in the year 1376; but it was not until the sixteenth century was considerably advanced, that the catacombs appear to have attracted any serious attention of the government and clergy. As measures of policy, some more entrances were closed up, and a few chapels and hermitages were erected near to them, or on the hills above them. About 1535, under Pope Paul III., some of the more remarkable of the crypts seem to have been cleared of the rubbish which had accumulated in them, and to have been cleansed and illuminated by a few lamps. Some years later there arose in the person of a Roman priest, a species of "Old Mortality," a perfect enthusiast for tombs, monumental inscriptions, church antiquities, and catacombs. This was Father Antonio Bosio, who spent nearly the whole of his life, or more than thirty years (from 1567 to 1600), in digging and groping in the catacombs; in clearing the way into some of the innermost crypts which had been blocked up for centuries; in making drawings and directing engravings of all the ancient monuments, inscriptions, paintings,

sculptures, lamps, and vases that he discovered underground. For the most part, his researches, his arduous labours, could be pursued only by the light of torches, resinous pine-branches, and oil lamps. He lived so much in the dark catacombs, that the bright light of the sun was painful to his eyes; he passed so much of his time under ground, that the earth's surface dazzled and perplexed him: *he*, indeed, had become a Troglodite, a Cimmerian. But for the enthusiasm of this one man—this lowly priest—much of the subterranean Rome might still be an unknown world, and innumerable objects, interesting as the first links in the chain of the history of Christian art, might still be inaccessible, and deeply buried under sand, earth, and heaps of pulverizing tufo. Father Bosio did not survive to see the publication of his work, and the effect it produced throughout Europe: he died while writing his last chapter. The manuscripts, drawings, and engravings, passed into the hands of Father Severano, who added a chapter of his own, and published the work at Rome, in the year 1632, under the title of *Roma Sotterranea*.

This work was translated into Latin by Father Aringhi, and by him published at Rome in 1651, 1659, in two very large folio volumes. These books really revealed what was a *terra incognita* to a great part of the world; they doubly interested the Church and papal government in the preservation of the long-dishonoured monuments, and they imparted to the catacombs of Rome a popular and European interest, which was not soon to pass away.

These under-ground researches, this catacomb literature, did not terminate with Bosio, Severano, and Aringhi. In 1720 Father Marc-Antonio Boldetti, canon of Santa-Maria in Trastevere, and custode, or guardian in chief, of the catacombs, published, in folio, a volume, entitled "Observations on the Cemetries of the Holy Martyrs and ancient Christians of Rome." This Father Boldetti was a very learned man, and another pure enthusiast: like his precursor Bosio, he passed his life in the crypts, devoting more than thirty years to the examination of the tombs and works of art. In both these ecclesiastics, the fervent zeal of

the Roman Catholic Christian was allied with the enthusiasm of the antiquarian : without the higher and the holier incentive, there could scarcely have been so much self-denial and such astonishing perseverance. In their researches and excavations, the lives of both the priests were several times in peril ; and it should appear that the days, at least of Bosio, were shortened by his labours. Boldetti opened many new crypts, discovered numerous oratories or chapels, and a vast heap of ancient objects of all sorts. His book, like the catacombs themselves, has been called a real mine of religious antiquities ; the numerous engravings it contains, and the originals of which now form a considerable portion of the *Museo Cristiano* of the Vatican, greatly increase the value of the work.*

Boldetti was followed by the learned Bottari, who was deeply versed in profane as well as in ecclesiastical antiquities. His work, entitled, "Sculptures and Pictures extracted from the Cemeteries of Rome," was printed by the Vatican press, and published in three large folio

* Raoul Rochette. "Tableau des Catacombes de Rome."

volumes in 1737 and 1754. Father Marangoni, a laborious Jesuit, who had been the companion of Boldetti in most of the researches of the catacombs, published two works connected with the subject, between the years 1740 and 1744. Father Lupi, another Jesuit, who had been the friend and companion of Boldetti and Marangoni, also published a work on the subject; and this was followed, after an interval of some forty years, by the publication of his posthumous work, "Descriptions, Letters, &c.," edited by Father Zaccharia (Faenza, 1785, two volumes in quarto). In this last work Lupi treats of Christian antiquities in general, and of the catacombs of Rome in particular, and his book contains much valuable information not to be found elsewhere. Portions of the great works of Raphael Fabretti, of Filippo Buonarrotti, of Ciampini, of Father Allegranza, and of the bishop Mamachi, are devoted to the catacombs and their countless crypts, tombs, and inscriptions. Towards the close of the last century an ingenious Frenchman, M. d'Agincourt, a passionate lover of Christian archæology, settled himself in Rome to study these matters: he intended to stay six months, but he remained

fifty years, solely occupied, all that time, in collecting and arranging the materials of a book, which (like the work of Bosio) did not appear until after his death. The posthumous volumes of D'Agincourt, entitled "History of the Fine Arts taken from their Monuments," treats of the catacombs at great length, and with learning and discrimination. The subject has not been neglected in recent times, for, between the years 1823 and 1850, works treating of the catacombs have been published by Münster, the Danish bishop, by M. Raoul Rochette, the Padre Marchi, Dr. Charles Maitland, M.D., the Abbé Gaume, and the Abbé Gerbet.

It would be easy to add to the catalogue of this subterranean Christian-art literature; but the list is already long enough.*

Let modern writers criticise as they will the Romish hagiologists and monkish legends, too many of which are, indeed,—

"Sad to the soul, o'erlaid with idle words;"

* A mention of other writers will be found in the work of M. Raoul Rochette, which I consider by far the best of these modern books.

still these recesses will remain as places sanctified to us by reverential recollections, by solemn, holy associations, and by pious hopes.

It appears that even in the worst times, when the catacombs were neglected, and even shunned as places of sin and of danger, a few personages, moved by piety and curiosity, occasionally visited some of the few which were most accessible, and left behind them, on the walls or tombstones, brief inscriptions, hastily and slightly cut, to record their visits. Thus we find in one of the crypts a few words denoting that a bishop of Pisa and his companions had been there at the beginning of the fourteenth century; and in another place are traced the names of six individuals (names which look very like German ones Latinized), with the sign of the cross after each name, and the date A.D. 1397 underneath them all. On one of the Christian tombs, of a very early date, probably of the first century, were found a palm-leaf worked in silver, and a small coronet of silver, gilded and inscribed with a name and the date 1340. These objects had been preserved by the pozzolano and earth falling

in upon them, and burying them. The rest of that crypt had been visited by Goths or Lombards in the sixth or seventh century; for the tombs were broken open, and the pictures on the walls battered and defaced. In another crypt was found this inscription, with the date 1321 above it, and the names of three visitors beneath it :—" Gather together, oh Christians, in these caverns, to read the holy books, to sing hymns to the honour of martyrs and the saints that here lie buried, having died in the Lord; to sing psalms for those who are now dying in the faith! There is light in this darkness. There is music in these tombs."

It is more than probable that, during these times of anarchy, the wealthy, among the rare visitors, caused the graves and monuments in some of the crypts to be buried under earth and sand, as the best means of preserving them from further outrage. When Boldetti, at the beginning of the last century, was continuing the subterranean researches of the indefatigable Bosio, he found, particularly in the catacombs of St. Agnes, long galleries entirely filled with sand, as if the material had been conveyed

thither by the labour of men at no very remote period.

As soon as the discoveries of Bosio attracted attention, Pope Clement VIII. pronounced sentence of excommunication and severe corporal punishment against any person that should enter the catacombs without permission, or extract from them any object whatsoever. The decree was successively confirmed by three other pontiffs, and in the year 1672 Clement X. confided the exclusive superintendence and care of the catacombs to the Cardinal Vicar, who was to be assisted by a general guardian, of the rank of a bishop or otherwise eminent in the Church.

If Pompeii—which has been happily called “an ancient town potted for posterity”^{*}—if her silent streets, dwelling-houses, tombs, temples, theatres, baths, and public places, disinterred almost in our own days, and brought to light from beneath the sand, ashes, lapilli, scorixæ, sulphureous mud, and the other ejections of Vesuvius, which had covered and concealed

^{*} Earl of Dudley. “Letters to the Bishop of Llandaff.”

them all for the space of sixteen hundred years, convey to the mind of the visitor the clearest notion of ancient Pagan life, the catacombs, with their accessories, and with the objects which have been removed from them to the sacred museum of the Vatican, present a scarcely less vivid picture of early Christian life. To eyes which look with hope beyond this "earth, earthy," to a properly tutored and chastised mind, the impression produced by the two places and the two periods is very dissimilar.

"To enjoy in a more lively manner the emotions caused by this subterranean Rome, we have but to contrast them with the feelings excited by a visit to the ruins of the Pagan city of Pompeii. Nothing can be more desolating than the aspect of that dead city, half-rising from the grave, not to be resuscitated and repeopled, but to give, as it were, a false air of life, to entice the perfumes of spring and the sweet breath of nature to wander again in its void streets, uselessly illuminated by the sun. The dark shades of the catacombs produce on the soul an effect entirely different from that of the sun of Pompeii; for the grand charm

of these places chiefly consists in the contrast between the physical night which reigns around, and the spiritual day which shone upon its old inhabitants, and which still shines from their graves. Pompeii, with a very few exceptions, recalls nothing but the material life of her citizens, their excitements and agitations, their feasts, their pleasures, and those *temporal* things which fleet away : no place seems fitter for those ceremonies of the Church which particularly enforce the nothingness of this world. When, at the beginning of Lent, a priest hands the ashes to the workmen employed in excavating these ruins, between the mouldering walls of an ancient Pagan house transformed into a Christian chapel, and says, "Oh man ! remember that thou art dust, and that to dust thou wilt return," there cannot be a better echo for the words than that of Pompeii. But in the subterranean cemeteries of Rome, cemeteries and death-houses as they are, the idea of death is only accessory ; the dominant sentiment is that of immortality. If faith in a future existence could be lost upon earth, it would be found again under the earth in these catacombs, and

among these tombs. The immense labour and love of the truth which made these excavations, could not end in merely leaving an endless labyrinth, winding through tufo and pozzolano; the monument of that truth could never be left as the vestibule of annihilation, of grim and hopeless NOTHING. Let the most hardened materialist but pass one half-hour of silent and lonely meditation in these crypts, and it is to be believed that his incredulity will be shaken: to the ears of the pious these graves speak eloquently, and harmonious voices from walls and tombs call upon them to rejoice and hope. In the bygone times, men of holy life came habitually to pray in these grottos, and to pass whole nights in worship, in contemplation; feeling themselves to be nearer to Heaven in these unknown dark recesses than when in the temples above ground.

“Mundo ignotus, cœlo propior innotesceret.”

“It was the subterranean Rome that fed the fountain of Faith, Hope, and Charity, which blessed the living, sun-lighted earth.”*

* The Abbé P. Gerbet. “Rome Chrétienne,” tome premier.

In the troubles of the Roman Church which arose out of the French revolution, and the invasions of Italy by Bonaparte, the traditional uses of the subterranean world were referred to more than once. In the year 1809, pretending to be the successor of Charlemagne, and to hold an imperial authority over Rome, Bonaparte insisted that the pope should close his seaports against the English shipping, raise troops for his service, and, virtually, join in the war against England and her allies. Pius VII., who then wore the tiara, and who was one of the best and most amiable men that ever did wear it, refused compliance, in a dignified and affecting note. "I shall make no resistance," said the pontiff: "*I am ready to retire into a convent, or into the same catacombs of Rome that afforded shelter to the first successors of St. Peter.* Europe will see how I am treated, and I shall prove that I have acted according to my honour and my conscience. If I am deprived of life, the tomb will honour me, and I shall be justified in the eyes of God and in the memory of men." The sequel of the story cannot be forgotten. Pius VII. was arrested

in his palace at midnight, whirled through Italy to Savona, and thence, after a time, conveyed into France. He was a state prisoner at Fontainebleau in 1813, when the glorious victory gained by the allies at Leipzig broke his chains, and restored him to his country and to Rome.

BOOK II.

“Non mortua, sed data somno.”

[Not dead, but sleeping.]

PRUDENTIUS.

“It is the heaviest stone that Melancholy can throw at a man, to tell him he is at the end of his nature ; or that there is no further state to come, unto which this seems progressional, and otherwise made in vain.”

SIR THOMAS BROWNE—*Hydriotaphia*.

“Procul ! Oh ! procul, este profani.”

[Hence ! Oh ! far hence, ye profane.]

ABOUT the middle of the fourth century, when the new faith was firmly established at Rome, and when there was a pause in the horrors of intestine war, some of the catacombs were put into decent order, and were much visited by the people. Fervent believers, relieved from the pagan persecution, descended with a joyous veneration into the grottos, which still bore the impress of torture and death, and which nearly everywhere offered to the sight the resting-place of some holy man or woman,

youth or maiden, who had perished rather than renounce the truths which had been taught them. An ornamentation of the tombs, oratories, and baptisteries, was then commenced, but the old arts of the Romans had wofully decayed ; the new birth of art was as yet at the distance of centuries ; the painting was simple in design and colour, the sculpture rude, and the ornamentation was not carried to any extent. A description which remains to us in the writings of Saint Jerome, is not only simple, touching, and picturesque by itself, but it may be taken as a correct sketch of the catacombs both as they then were and as they now are.

“ While I dwelt at Rome, in my boyhood,” says the saint, “ and was receiving a liberal education, I was accustomed to visit, every Sunday, with my schoolfellows of my own age, these sepulchres of apostles and martyrs. We frequently penetrated into the crypts, dug in the bowels of the earth ; and the cut walls of which, on the right hand and on the left, were equally graves for the dead. And the darkness which reigns there is so dense, that it is almost like a fulfilment of the Prophet’s

words, ‘Let them go down alive into hell!’” At long intervals, the horror of darkness is softened by a few rays of light descending from above, through holes in the roof,—not windows, so much as cracks and clefts. As you walk on with slow steps through that caliginous gloom, you shudder, and think of Virgil,—

“Horror ubique animos, simul ipsa silentia terrent.”

It is difficult to say what is the precise number of these catacombs, for some were entirely lost sight of during the dark ages, and several that were closed up have never been re-opened. Those who have lived long at Rome, and have been accustomed to pedestrian exercise, will remember how many entrances into subterranean passages are to be found under the hills, and on the plains on either side the Tiber. These inlets, formed by the breaking in of the tufo and soil, or made by the stone-cutters as *spiragli*, or breathing-holes, are generally surrounded by gigantic weeds and brushwood, and are to be seen only by those who examine the country on foot, and quit the high roads and frequented paths. In the

twelfth century, Petrus Mallius enumerated nineteen of these subterranean cemeteries. In the following century, the author of a book, called "The Wonders of the City of Rome," brought up the number to twenty-one, and dwelt with astonishment on the extent of some of them. "There are catacombs," says he, "that run three miles under-ground; it was in these that the holy martyrs concealed themselves in times of persecution." In the sixteenth century, Panvini counted thirty-nine catacombs, and gave the distinctive name of each. The Abbé Gerbet, the most recent writer on the subject,* makes the number ascend to fifty; but he appears, in some instances, to count as separate excavations two catacombs which are joined together by crypts and galleries, and which may be considered as only one.

The principal entrance into nearly every one of the great catacombs, opens upon one of the ancient and far-famed viæ, or high roads of Rome; thus, some are upon the Via Appia, some upon the Via Ostiensis, some upon the

* *Esquisse de Rome Chrétienne*, vol. ii. Paris, 1850.

Via Flaminia, some upon the Via Prenestina, some upon the Via Tiburtina, &c.

These entrances are mostly low and dark ; beyond them you see one or more long, low, dark aisles, the great length of which is concealed in the obscurity which envelopes every object at the distance of a few paces from the torches and lanterns which you and your guides may carry. Nothing can well be more solemn than this subterranean gloom, and the effect produced by the objects brought to light as you advance. The yawning tombs on either side of you, and before and behind you,—skulls, skeletons, crosses ! Nothing is here but speaks of persecution or of death. The entire length of few of these aisles is known ; for, as a measure of precaution, many of them have been closed by stone walls, while others are so blocked up by rubbish and fallen blocks of pozzolano, that the boldest explorer is compelled to halt. At irregular distances, and usually on both sides of the main aisle, narrower passages branch off, leading to other crypts. Mostly, these passages strike off at right angles, but they seldom run far in a straight line, while many of them

become very tortuous. Many of these passages are now wholly blocked up, while others are so encumbered with rubbish, that, in order to get through them, the explorer must crawl on his hands and knees. Some of them, besides running into the principal crypts, branch off into other low passages, which lead to nothing. The difficulty of finding one's way in such a labyrinth, without a guide, may be easily comprehended. From the second crypt, or main aisle, which you reach, there are other passages conducting to another crypt; and thence from another to another, according to the great or less extent of the catacomb. In most of the catacombs there are crypts, galleries, and passages underneath those which you first enter, and in many of them there is "beneath this lower deep a deeper still," or a third or even a fourth range of crypts. Access is obtained to these subterraneans beneath subterraneans by means of shafts and staircases, or inclined planes; and an involuntary descent is sometimes obtained by careless travellers, through holes which have been made by the falling in of the tufo flooring of the upper

galleries. In the second and third tiers the arrangement is the same as in the first; side-passages run from crypt to crypt, or twist or turn, and lead to nothing. The awful silence of these deep cavities more than ever adds horror to the darkness. The atmosphere, smelling and tasting of earth and dust, is hot, dry, stifling; it is not "the cursed dew of dungeon's damp," but something far more irksome and oppressive. In some of the lowest, narrowest, and most tortuous of the passages, this air is not to be braved with impunity; there the torches go out, or burn dimly, and the hardy explorer rushes back with the painful sensations of suffocation. There is nothing down here that has life: not so much as a fly, or the minutest insect, is to be found. If there exist any objects at all, they are mournful mementos of man's mortality,—skulls, bones, broken epitaphs, or graves closed up with slabs, bearing the symbols of death and of martyrdom, or empty and open, and, as it were, yawning for fresh tenants.

Generally, in the uppermost galleries, at very irregular distances, there are large niches

cut into the tufo or pozzolano which forms the sides of the passages. These niches were carefully elaborated by the earlier Christians; they are dome-shaped over-head, and the domes are frequently ornamented with rude, primitive painting and sculpture,—perhaps the first specimens the world now possesses of Christian art. Some of the niches were oratories or chapels, some served as baptisteries, and in a few of them, not only is the holy fount, set up at the dawn of our faith in Europe, still erect and undefaced, but its cavity is still filled with pure water, brought from a distance by small subterranean pipes, which were probably laid by the immediate successors of the Apostles. In the catacombs at Naples, several of these oratories and baptisteries are considerable in size. Not so at Rome; here the dimensions of all the niches are inconsiderable,—not one of the chapels could ever have held more than a very small congregation, closely packed. Yet in these narrow, subterranean niches, the ecclesiologist may trace the original forms, distributions, and arrangements, of the earliest Christian churches of Rome, which

were afterwards reproduced and stereotyped in the splendid Roman *BASILICHE*,—those temples which became the models for all Christendom. The best, or most perfectly preserved, of these oratories are to be found in the catacomb of St. Agnes, and in that of St. Priscilla: here Christian architecture may be studied in its very cradle.

“Occurrent cæsis immissa foramina tectis,
Quæ jaciunt claros antra super radios.”*

Occasionally there is, within these oratories and baptisteries, or close by them, some spiracle, loophole, or window, cut through the tufo, which admits fresh air and the cheering light of day; and it is a relief, never to be forgotten by those who have once felt it, to come,—after being long pent in the close, heavy, sepulchral atmosphere of the crypts, and after long groping in that Cimmerian darkness, but feebly dissipated, and only for the distance of a few feet, by torches and lanterns,—upon one of these breathing-places, to respire again the sweet, fresh breath of Heaven,

* Prudentius, Hymn xi.

and to see once more the rays of the glorious sun, the shadow of the Almighty.

Without reposing implicit faith in popular traditions, or in the belief and sayings which one generation of labourers and peasants inherits from another, we may feel assured that, if thoroughly cleared out, the extent of some of these subterraneans in the south of Italy would be found to be prodigious. It is a deep-rooted article of faith with the people who live about the great catacombs at Naples, who have passed their whole lives there, and whose fathers and grandfathers lived and died there before them, that one branch of these excavations, cut on an ascending plane, ran as far as the hill and village of Arianella (the birthplace of the great painter and poet Salvator Rosa), and reopened upon a valley at a considerable distance beyond that village. The labyrinth cannot be threaded, for, on account of robbers and banditti, who, as at Rome, made these crypts their hiding-places and their strongholds, the Spanish viceroys of the country, between the sixteenth and seventeenth century, stopped up most of them with strong stone walls. As the

crow flies, or in a perfectly straight line, the distance from the main entrance of the catacombs, under the beautiful hill called Capo di Monte, in the suburbs of Naples, to the valley behind Arianella, must be between three and four miles. But what is curious is this,—in that valley there is a subterranean which runs in the direction of Capo di Monte, but which is blocked up by rubbish at a few hundred feet from the mouth; and between that crypt and Naples, other excavations, continuing in the same line, are to be traced by means of *spiragli*, or of holes made by the falling in of the superincumbent tufo and earth, or by shafts, which evidently were artistically sunk, to give light and air to that nether world, and to allow of the extraction of the tufo. There appears to be something trogloditic in the nature of all peoples; traces of a passion for subterraneans are found in nearly every country. It seems as if, when men once began to dig underground, they knew not where or when to stop. We need not travel out of our own island to find evidences of this old passion; and even now the mere mention of the word “subterranean”

awakens in the mind an involuntary feeling of awe, mystery, and romance. If the three tiers or stages of the Roman catacombs be traversed, and all the side crypts, communications, and winding passages, be explored, some of these excavations, even blocked up as they are, may probably measure two or three miles. Many of the chambers and long crypts, in which the indefatigable Bosio pursued his labours, were filled up by himself when he had removed the monuments, inscriptions, vases, and lamps, and had made drawings of the paintings and other objects. He wanted a place conveniently near in which to deposit the pozzolano, rubbish, and dust, which he removed from a new excavation ; and thus, as one crypt was opened, another was partially closed.

A German traveller, who wrote about the middle of the last century, says, that to visit every part of the catacombs of St. Sebastian alone (the most extensive of them all), would, in his opinion, be a walk of twenty miles : and that, if the length of all the crypts, galleries, passages of communication, and passages diving into the earth, could be summed up and put together,

there might be one hundred miles of this subterranean Rome.* But in his time, not a few of these souterrains were walled, or in the process of being walled up, several persons, bewildered in the labyrinths, having perished therein.

In some of the principal crypts, stones are set up in the middle to direct travellers on their return, and to keep them from the shafts, or dangerous holes, which lead to the chasm underneath. That chaotic darkness was at one time otherwise lighted ; lamps, of which some of the chains are still found, were suspended from the domed roofs of the oratories and baptisteries, at rather regular distances. Small niches were cut in the tufo, on both sides of the crypt, and in each of these niches was placed a small lamp. These lamps were kept burning at all hours, and it was the duty of certain of the acolytes of the subterranean priesthood to see them duly replenished with oil. But the lamps, whether of bronze, or of terra-cotta, or of common clay, have long since

* Keysler. "Travels in Germany, Italy," &c.

been removed to the Vatican, or to other museums; only one or two being left here and there in their niches, without wick or oil, merely to show their original use and disposition.

On each side of the crypt (only with an occasional interval) there runs a line of tombs, or rather a congeries of tombs upon tombs: the pozzolano or tufo, which forms as it were the thick walls of the aisle, is cut into small horizontal recesses, each recess being intended for a grave: there are often three, and not unfrequently as many as eight or ten of these recesses, cut out the one above the other, reaching from the floor of the aisle to the roof. In appearance these abodes of the dead may be compared to the hatching-ovens of Egypt, in which one layer of eggs, with a partition between, is laid over another; or, to take a more familiar illustration, the graves may be assimilated to a bookcase, with three or more shelves; or, still better, to one of those armoires or presses which are found in some of our old houses, worked in the wall, with shelf above shelf, and thick partitions between. The bodies, just as they lay on the bier, were intro-

duced horizontally into these tufo graves, and the mouths or outer flanks were then closed up with slabs of stone or marble, on which was usually engraved some short inscription, some symbol of the faith, and some implements denoting the professions or callings of the deceased. This last custom is still preserved by one of the Christian churches of the East. The Armenians of the old Eutychian Church inscribe their tombstones with tools and implements, putting on the tomb of a carpenter a saw and mallet, on that of a tailor a pair of shears, on that of a barber razors and tweezers, etc. Besides these stacks of graves in the catacombs, there are others that are separate and single: here and there the flank of the crypt, at about three feet from the floor, is cut into a recess, usually arched over-head; the top of the three feet of tufo which is left beneath, is flattened, and a grave is dug in it. There are other niches deeper than these, and reaching to the floor of the crypt, and in these were always found one or more sarcophagi of hard stone or marble. Some of the sarcophagi were elaborately sculptured, and denoted, by

the inscriptions, that they contained the bones and ashes of Christians of rank and fortune. Not a few of them bore Pagan ornaments and mythological symbols, strangely in discord with the *religio loci*. These are supposed to have contained the ashes of unconverted Romans before they were appropriated by Christians. It is, however, believed that many of the early Christian artists, who worked upon the sarcophagi and monuments, long retained certain set forms or conventionalities of their art, and felt no sin or scruple in putting an heathenish emblem on the grave of a true believer, sometimes, perhaps, overlooking its meaning, sometimes intending that it should be interpreted by an accommodation to Christian ideas. Indeed, the practice long prevailed. Our mediæval sacred art is strongly infused with the Pagan element, and delights in reproducing forms that seem to us strangely at variance with the objects of the works and the holy places for which they were destined. Specimens of this may be found in several of our venerable cathedrals, and they abound on the continent, in the middle-age churches of Italy, France, Belgium, and Southern Ger-

many. The sarcophagi must be sought for in the great Christian museum of the Vatican, and in other parts of Rome ; for very few remain in the niches of the catacombs.

Of these tiers and intermediate rows of side-graves many are broken open and void, others are still closed, and conceal the sad relics of mortality within ; while in others the slab which shut up the flank of the grave is broken in twain, and allows a sight of the recumbent skeleton.

Some of these sepulchres were made to contain two bodies, as that of a man and his wife ; others, still more capacious, received three or four or more tenants : and there are puticuli, or deep shafts, like wells, in which the ancient Romans threw the dead bodies of their slaves and malefactors, by scores and by hundreds. Most of these deep cavities are closed, but some of those which remain open present, at the distance of a few feet from the floor of the crypts, a horrible compact condensed mass of human skulls and bones, all white or grayish, and looking as if calcined. The Romans threw quick lime into these frightful pits, to hasten the destruction of the bodies. Precisely

the same practices prevail at Naples in the well-known Campo Santo, or holy field, or cemetery of the poor. There, a large quadrangular place is inclosed by stone walls; the soil underneath is tufo; in this are sunk three hundred and sixty-five pozzi or great graves, one for every day in the year; the entrance into these death-chambers is on a level with the ground, and narrow like the mouth of a well. All the poor who expire in the hospitals, and all the paupers who die in the populous city on one day, and have none to bury them, are carried to this spot, and thrown pell-mell into one of the pits, without a rag to cover them,—naked as they came to the world! I have counted in one of these pits as many as fifteen bodies thus disposed of, and there were others beneath which I could not see. At sunset a quantity of lime is thrown into the pit, and the mouth of it is shut up by a closely-fitting stone slab; that sepulchre then remains undisturbed and unopened until the following year, and the one next to it, or marked next in date, is opened on the morrow morning to receive its annual supply of dead. At the

expiration of the year of rest, nothing is left in the pit but lime, skulls, and bones; and when its turn comes round again, when the closing stone is removed, and its hideous maw reopened, there is room, and to spare, for the reception of all the poor, friendless dead that day. It is then again shut up until the following year, and so, in succession, year after year.

The number of the graves in one of the larger of the Roman catacombs, as that of St. Sebastian, taking all the crypts, and the excavations under excavations, is enormous, and the amount of the dead deposited there defies rational calculation. For who could count the contents of one of those deep and horrible pits, filled almost to the brim, or the contents of one of those long chambers which were filled by Bosio and his successors, and then walled up; or the contents of all those lateral graves, or those heaps of skulls and bones which lie here and there on the floors of the crypts?

At Naples, during the dreadful plague of 1656, when death marched far too rapidly to allow the grave-diggers to keep pace with him, the dead were carried to the catacombs by

many hundreds a day, and thrown, one upon the other, on the ground, at a dark, damp spot not far from the principal mouth of those subterraneans; no earth or dust was thrown upon that heap of mortality, but waggon-loads of lime were shot over it. We do not find it so recorded, but there is reason to believe that, during the many pestilences which desolated Rome between the first and the seventeenth century, the Roman catacombs were occasionally applied to the same uses, and made to receive many and many thousands of dead.

When, for the first time, Sir Walter Scott was conducted to the disinterred, lone, silent city of Pompeii, where nothing meets the eye but records of antiquity, and the monuments and works of men who passed away seventeen hundred years ago, and many of them some centuries farther back, the only remark, the only exclamation he uttered, was "The City of the Dead! The City of the Dead!" With still more appositeness may this subterranean Rome be called a city of the dead—a world of death. Hard is the heart, or brutalized the imagination, of the man who can

enter these caverns and thread these gloomy crypts without feelings of awe, reverence, and devotion. To the right heart and proper mind one visit to such a spot, one hour passed among the dead in these awful solitudes, and in the presence of the objects by which Christians first attempted to express to the eye the one grand truth that the soul perishes not with the body, and to symbolize the glorious hope of immortality, and the coming of a world wherein there should be no torture, no sin, no suffering, no sorrow, is calculated to give a new vitality to faith and hope.

Wild and bootless as the task must seem, there have not been wanting enthusiastic visionary necrologists who have devoted time, labour, and ingenuity to estimate not only the number of tombs, but also the number of the dead in these immense vaults. Others have undertaken the scarcely less difficult and profitless task of calculating the volume and weight of the tufo and pozzolano taken out of these excavations. But where are the data for such a calculation? Who can assign the uttermost limits of any one of these catacombs? Who has

broken through those interrupting mounds of earth, or those strong walls which have been closed for centuries? Who can tell what lies beyond those impediments, or how much farther the crypt extends, or how many chambers and winding passages branch off from it? Yet these dreams and speculations are not to be treated with derision or cold contempt, for they denote a lasting pious interest in objects little regarded by the world, and scorned by mere worldlings, though possessing one of the strongest of claims on Christian sympathy.

A recent writer on the catacombs, who, on the point of their extent, is wrong only in attributing *all* the excavations to the first Christians (although most, if not all of them, were commenced and carried far into the bowels of the earth by the Pagans, and many centuries before the dawn of our faith), is enthusiastic in contemplating the dimensions of this nether world. "Here is a glorious monument of the faith and charity of our forefathers! Seized with awe, you pass before the gigantic ruins of the Colosseum, you salute with admiration the ærial arches of the Aqueduct

of Claudius; you pause, astonished and stupified, before the pyramids of Egypt; you read with enthusiasm the descriptions of Nineveh and Babylon, those marvellous cities of the ancient Orient; and you say,—these astounding works are titles of immortality for the kings and the peoples who made them. Your admiration is legitimate and reasonable; yet, remembering the wealth and the power of the founders, and the vast resources at their command, we can conceive the possibility, nay, even the facility of the colossal works. But, I ask, what ought a traveller to feel at the first view of a marvel which surpasses in boldness and extent the amphitheatre of Flavian, the aqueducts of Rome, the pyramids of Egypt, and Nineveh and Babylon? This work of giants was completed by a community of poor men, destitute of resources, without talent as without fortune, incessantly persecuted, and frequently decimated. What, then, was the secret of their power? This is the problem suggested by the sight of the catacombs in general, and by the catacombs on the Appian Way in particular. The solution is in one

word—FAITH. This power—unknown to the ancient world, and too little regarded in the modern world—this faith was the lever by which the early Christians could remove mountains, and turn and change the universe. With one hand they constructed, in the bowels of the earth, a city more astonishing than Babylon, or the Rome of the Cæsars; and with the other, seizing upon the Pagan world in the abyss of degradation into which it was plunged, they raised it to the virtue of angels, and suspended it to the cross.”*

The holy Prudentius, who visited Rome in the fourth century, exclaimed, to a friend: “We have seen the countless ashes of saints! You ask me, oh Valerian, priest of Christ, what are the inscriptions left upon these tombs? you wish to know the names and the number of these dead. Difficult is it to give you a reply; so numerous are these people of the just, who were extirpated by an impious fury, while Rome, daughter of Troy, worshipped her old gods! There are, however, many of these

* The Abbé Gaume. “Les Trois Romes.”

tombs which speak: the small letters traced upon them record the names of the martyrs, or contain some short and expressive epitaphs. But there are multitudes of these marbles, which cover a silent assemblage, merely making known the total number of the dead.

“Sunt et multa tamen tacitas claudentia turbas,
Marmora quæ solum significant numerum.”*

This enumeration is in some respects curious; the inscription runs thus:—“Three bodies lie here in peace.” “Here are interred six.” “Pray for twelve,” or for fifty, or for more, as the number may be. But no figures have ever been put over the great deep wells, nor is there any sort of inscription to be found near them. The heathen Romans, even when they had attained to their highest point of civilization and refinement, had no more feeling or consideration for the mortal remains of their slaves than they had for the carcasses of dead dogs. As dogs the poor bondsmen were treated while living, and as such they were disposed of after

* Prudentius. “Ad Valerian. episcop.” Hymnus xi.

death.* From the very beginning, the converts and preachers of Christianity distinguished themselves by their scrupulous care of the remains of the poorest and most abject; the neophytes of the faith found here clean, dry, decent sepulchres, and were interred with prayers and hymns; their tombs, when closed, were sanctified by other prayers and services, and a commination was pronounced against such as should presume to disturb the rest of the dead.

The best way to judge of the great length of some of these subterranean galleries, is to leave, from time to time, as you advance, a lighted torch behind you, and then to look back on the utmost point you reach, or from the point where the straight line begins to curve and twist. Besides conveying a notion as to dimensions, this simple process also produces a most impressive and solemn effect, especially if

* For a concise and most striking description of the miseries of the Roman slaves, and of the fearful extent to which slavery prevailed under the boasted *free* republic, the reader of Italian is referred to "Cantu, Storia Romana," a modern work of great merit.

the torches be so disposed as to illuminate some ghostly oratory, or some broad face of those compact tiers of graves. The stranger is certainly not safe without the attendance of guides accustomed all their lives to the intricacies of the labyrinths. These men carry under their arms bundles of rude links or torches, besides the lighted torches they carry in their hands. The traveller, however, will do well to provide himself with two or three large wax torches, such as are used in the Roman churches; for he may chance to be left behind by careless and hurried conductors, and their rude flambeaux, emitting nearly as much smoke as light, are not proper to reveal the delicate sculpture-work of some of the tombs, and the minute, faintly-cut letters of many of the inscriptions. The odour of a great number of these pitch links, burning altogether in those low, narrow crypts, is almost insupportable. A large company of explorers, with its numerous guides and lurid torches, presents, as it slowly winds through one of the long crypts, a most singular subterranean picture. With most people, the *genius loci*, the holy spirit of the place, imposes

a reverential silence, or if they speak, their voices are subdued. But the merest sound of a voice is startling there.

The timid or the nervous rarely venture far from the main entrance of a catacomb. Indeed, without courage, self-possession, patience, and a certain degree of facility in crawling through narrow holes, and climbing over impediments, much is not to be done in this underground world.

The misadventures of M. Robert, a French artist, form the best episode of the Abbé de Lille's poem, "L'Imagination."

In the want of a better version, the reader may accept the following very free imitation of the episode:—

“ Eager to know the secrets of the place,
The holy cradle of our Christian race,
A youthful artist threads these inmost cells,
And lowest crypts, where darkness ever dwells.
No friend to cheer him, and no guide to lead,
He boldly trusts a flambeau and a thread.
Brave and alone he cherishes his light,
And trusts the clue will lead him back aright.
Onward he goes along the low-arch'd caves,
Crowded with martyrs' relics and their graves ;
Through palaces of death, by countless tombs,
Through awful silence, and through thick'ning glooms ;

Yet pausing oft, as walls and slabs impart
Some lesson of the earliest Christian art,
Or some black chasm warns him to beware,
And choose his steps, and trim his torch with care.
Onward he goes, nor takes a note of time,
Impell'd, enchanted, in this dismal clime ;
Thrilling with awe, but yet untouch'd by fear,
He passes on from dreary unto drear !
The crypts diverge, the labyrinths are cross'd,—
He will return.—Alas ! his clue is lost !
Dropp'd from his hand, while tracing out an urn,
The faithless string is gone, and dimly burn
The flambeau's threads. He gropes, but gropes in vain,
Recedes, advances, and turns back again ;
A shivering awe, a downright terror, next
Seizes his soul, and he is sore perplex'd !
He halts, he moves, he thinks, he rushes on,
But only finds that issue is there none.
Crypt tangles crypt, a perfect network weaves
This dark Dædalian world, these horrent eaves.
He mutters to himself, he shouts, he calls,
And echo answers from a hundred walls.
That awful echo doubles his dismay,
That grimmer darkness leads his head astray.
Cold at his heart ! His breath, now quick, now slow,
Sounds in that silence like a wail of woe !
Oh ! for one cheering ray of Heaven's bright sun,
Which through long hours his glorious course hath run
Since he came here ! And now his torch's light
Flickers, expires in smoke —and all is night !
Thick-coming fancies trouble all his sense,
He strives, but vainly strives, to drive them thence ;
Cleaves his dried tongue unto the drier roof,
Nor word, nor breath hath he at his behoof ;

That dying torch last shone upon a grave,
That grave his tomb, for who shall help and save ?
Alone ! Yet not alone, for phantoms throng
His burning brain, and chase the crypts along.
And other spectres rush into the void—
Blessings neglected, leisure misemploy'd,
And passions left to rise and rage at will,
And faults, called follies, but were vices still ;
And wild caprice, and words at random spoken,
By which kind hearts were wounded, though not broken,
Bootless resolves, repentance late and vain,—
All these and more come thund'ring through his brain ;
Condensing in one single moment rife,
The sins of all his days, the history of his life ;
And death at hand ! Not that which heroes hail,
On battle-field, when ' Victory ! ' swells the gale,
And love of country, Glory standing by,
Make it a joy and rapture so to die !
But creeping death, slow, anguish'd, and obscure,
A famish'd death, no mortal may endure !
But this his end ! our prison'd artist's fate,
He young, he joyous, and but now elate
With every hope that warms the human breast,
Before experience tells that life 's a jest ;
Full of his art, of projects, and of love,
Must he expire, while creeping things above,
On the earth's surface, in the eye of day,
Revel in life, nor feel this drear dismay ?
But hark ! a step ? Alas, no step is there !
But see ! a glimmering light ! Oh ! foul despair !
No ray pervades this darkness, grim and rare.
He staggers, reels, and falls, and falling prone,
Grapples the ground where he must die alone,

But in that fall touches his outstretch'd hand
That precious clue the labyrinth can command,
Lost long, but now regain'd ! Oh happy wight,
Gather thy strength, and haste to life and light !
And up he rises, quick, but cautious grown,
And threads the mazes by that string alone ;
Comes into light, and feels the fanning breeze,
Sees the bright stars, and drops upon his knees ;
His first free breath is uttered in a prayer,
Such as none say but those who've known despair !
And never were the stars of Heaven so sheen
Except to those who'd dwelt where he had been,
And never Tiber, rippling through the meads,
Made music half so sweet among its reeds ;
And never had the earth such rich perfume
As when from him it chased the odour of the tomb ! ”

In the year 1798, shortly after the first entrance into Rome of the French Republican army, under General Berthier, a large party was formed to visit the catacombs. The party was arranged in after-dinner merriment and frolic, at a house of public entertainment near the Piazza di Spagna, and it consisted principally of thoughtless young officers and clerks of the commissariat. Determined to be merry where all was gloomy and sad, they conveyed with them abundant provisions and hampers of wine and bottles of brandy. They scared the

monks, who occupied a house and church near the mouth of the catacomb they had chosen to visit, and they perplexed and terrified the poor *custodi* and guides. But what could these poor people do? The French were masters of Rome, and, of the burghers of that city, a very great many had declared themselves as Jacobins, Republicans, and passionate admirers of the new order of things, not excepting, in that order, the gospel according to Voltaire or Rousseau. The young Frenchmen, who had all been educated in these doctrines, and who had been hardened by witnessing the orgies of the great revolution, and the blasphemous excesses of the Heberts and Chaumettes, after taking a short turn in the crypts, and laughing at everything they saw, set themselves down in one of the oratories, and began a carouse which did not end until the wine and the liquor were consumed, and every one of them was more or less inebriated.

They sang lewd love-songs and Bacchanalian choruses among the ancient Christian dead; they played at bowls with the skulls; they rummaged the open graves; they made jokes

and puns of the inscriptions ; they committed nearly every imaginable act of irreverence and impiety. They were mad with drink, and they had received a mad schooling.

In this state they renewed their exploration of the crypts, descending into the lowest tier, and betting who would venture farthest.

But, where all were mad, the maddest was a young cavalry officer, *un esprit fort*,—according to the meaning of that bad period, a fire-eater, *un crane*, one who feared not God nor devil, for he believed in neither ; one who courted danger with more assiduity than common mortals woo quiet and safety. Brave he assuredly was, though a very braggadocio. He would go further than anybody ; he would not leave the crypts until he had visited them all, and seen what was in them ; and, breaking away, with a lighted torch in his hand, but without any guide, he plunged into one of the lateral passages, and was followed for a space by the jeers, shouts, and loud laughter of his comrades. He did, indeed, go farther than any of them ; he penetrated so far, and through such obstructed and difficult crypts, that much

time was consumed, and his torch began to burn low. He then retraced his steps, and with great difficulty found his way back to the place where he had left, or where he believed he had left his party. Not a soul was there. He shouted, and none answered; his torch was now nearly extinguished; he was seized with a shuddering. But he had a second torch with him, and this he lighted in time. After many mistakes, he found the steps which led to the second tier of crypts. Here he expected to find his companions, but no voice replied to his call. He shuddered more than he had done before. But he thought that his friends were only playing him a trick, and that they were hiding in some of the passages, and watching him. He said to himself, "They must not see that I am disturbed and nervous;" and then he shouted aloud, "Come out, you ambuscaders! leave off this game! show your lights! let us be gone! we shall be too late for the billiard-table! I have a rendezvous at the coffee-house! I am burning and dying of thirst! I have swallowed earth and dust enough to bury a grenadier! I want wine and water! iced

water ! iced water !” But still no reply, no sound, no appearance of another light. He shouted again, and until he was horrified by the sound and the echoes of his own voice. He now seriously took himself to task for his foolhardiness ; yet he could not believe but that he should find his comrades in the upper crypts, or waiting for him at the gates ; and he proceeded hastily yet carefully in search of the other flight of steps. With all his care he could not find the direct passage, or anything like it ; and he stumbled and fell more than once, to the great danger of extinguishing his only light. But at length he saw the broad steps before him, and these he quickly ascended, singing a trooper’s song, to prove to his companions how perfect was his self-possession, or how little his nerves had been affected by his long, gloomy ramble.

But nobody joined in the chorus, or replied to his now renewed calls. No living creature was in that crypt. He made what speed he could to the mouth of the catacomb. The gates were closed, and no voice, either without or within, answered. Believing that at least some of his

comrades must have remained near at hand, he cried, that this was carrying the joke too far ; that he was choked, and dying of thirst, and must be let out. Still no answer. He looked at his watch, and saw that it was nearly nine o'clock at night. He clutched up a heavy fragment of a tombstone, and beat furiously upon the gate ; but the gate was strong, and opened inwards. He shouted again ; he became frantic, and screamed, and screamed until his dry tongue clove to its roof.

It was now clear that there was nobody who could, or that would hear him, and come to his relief. His thirst was agonizing, and his second torch had scarcely an inch to burn. But by the gate he found some remains of torches, which his companions had extinguished and thrown upon the ground at their exit ; and these he lighted one after the other. When the last remnant was rapidly consuming, he thought he would retrace his steps to the oratory in which they had kept their carousal ; for there, at least, was a *foramen* admitting air and light. On his way he fell, and his torch being extinguished, he was left in total darkness. As he groped his way, he

slipped through a chasm. The fall was considerable, the chamber beneath being so very full ; but he fell among dried, clattering, crackling bones ; and the flesh crept on his own bones, his blood turned cold, and his head became giddy. His mind, which had been wandering before, from the double effects of wine and awe or fear, was still farther unsettled by this shock ; but he made an effort, disengaged himself from that horrible chamber, and regained the crypt above. Prone to the earth, he crawled along, feeling the way with his outstretched hands, until he came to the oratory, where he sat down on the floor, with his back leaning against the slabs of graves. The aperture which faced him afforded entrance to a narrow flood of light, proceeding from the brilliant moon at its full, and the cool night air, which came in with the light, afforded a temporary refreshment and relief. Fatigued as he was, he thought he might sleep quietly until the morning. He summoned reason, and such philosophy as he possessed, to his aid. What had he to fear, unless some living brigands or marauders should find him there ? and of this there was little

probability or chance. What harm had the remains of the dead ever done to the living? It was only the dead who never returned to trouble us—“*Il n’y a que les morts qui ne reviennent pas,*” was a revolutionary dogma; and what was death itself but an eternal sleep? Had not every cemetery in France borne the inscription, “*LA MORT EST UN SOMMEIL ETERNEL?*” Had not the philosophers of France been proving for more than a quarter of a century, that the soul of man perished with his body, and that the existence of a future world, and the system of rewards and punishments, were things invented for the benefit of priests and impostors? He recalled the sarcasms of Voltaire, the mathematical demonstrations of d’Alembert, and the dogmas of the Atheist manual, “*Le Système de la Nature;*” but all would not avail him, or quiet his fluttering nerves; insensibly, and then irresistibly, the teachings of his childhood, the Christian lessons of the mother who had borne him, and of the country curate who had baptized him, came back upon his mind, and with them came thronging even the superstitions of nurses and

country servants, and the spectral tales of old village crones. He shuddered, he longed, he almost prayed for the morning, which would surely bring him liberation. He looked at his watch, and could see by the moonlight that it was close upon the midnight hour. His thirst was now more than ever intolerable. He would have given a good year's pay for one draught of cool water. Something glittered on the ground near the stone altar? What was it? A bottle. But the bottle contained not water, but was two-thirds filled with ardent spirit, with cognac brandy, which had been forgotten, and left behind. He seized it and eagerly drank of it, in the hope that it might dispel his horror and awe, and send him to sleep. He repeated his draughts until he had drained the bottle; and then was completed the insane furor which for some hours had been gathering in his mind. Horrible visions flitted before his eyes, which sleep could not close; he lay motionless, and utterly incapable of motion, on the dusty earth; but his pulse raced like the torrent of a cataract, and his brain worked, and incessantly presented one spectrum more awful than the

other. The void sockets of the skulls lying opposite to him were suddenly filled up with glaring ghastly eyes, that gazed upon him, and from which he could not detach his own gaze. He heard woful sighs and moans, groans and shrieks, as of souls in torture. He heard a low whispering, as if proceeding from many thousands of concealed beings. He heard a clapping of hands, and the loud, dismal tone of a bell. Yet all the sounds that could possibly have reached his ear proceeded from the night breeze, which rustled among the weeds and bushes outside, and feebly murmured as it entered the chasm,—from owls or other hooting nocturnal birds,—from the tinkling of the bells of some sheep in a *mandra*, or fold, on the slope of a hill at a short distance, or from the bell of a distant monastery, ringing to call the monks of some austere order to midnight prayer or very early matins.

But the young Frenchman was now incapable of deduction or of any reasoning process whatever. To his ears that loud awful bell tolled again, and a voice, louder than thunder, echoed through the dreary vaults, and three

several times were repeated these words:—
“Caverns, show forth your dead! The muster-roll is calling! Let there be a death parade!”
To his wild eyes, the black crypt, in its whole extent, was suddenly illuminated by a dazzling and supernatural light, as if the dry atmosphere itself had taken fire and was in a blaze with spontaneous combustion; and the bones of the dead, which lay scattered on the ground, or were heaped up indiscriminately in great heaps, became endued with the power of motion, and moved, and joined, and adhered together, and perfect skeletons rose and stood bolt upright, waving their arm-bones to and fro, as if in impatience, or anger, or in pain; and the graves, tier above tier, flew open, and their tenants descended from them; and a wide chasm opened under-foot, and through it, from the lowest recesses, came trooping other skeletons, of all forms and sizes, from that of the man of gigantic stature to that of the tiny infant who had died on the day of its birth: and, falling into rank or line with the rest, these bare, blanched bones marched slowly through the crypt, shaking their unfleshed

hands at the Frenchman as they passed him. And there was no end to the mustering and marching of the dead from the regions below through that chasm : they seemed to be flowing on for ever like a river.

This was the last vision, or the last of which any recollection was preserved. At no very late hour in the morning the catacombs were reopened to admit other French visitors, and the young officer was found by the guides in a state of stupor and unconsciousness. He was carried into Rome, and consigned to his friends and to the military hospital. In their wild intoxication, some of them had taken it into their heads that it was time to correct his boasting habit and fool-hardiness, and that it would indeed be a good joke to leave him behind. The narrator of the story said that it was probable that the guides, who understood no French, and who had been drinking with the officers, did not miss him out of so large a company ; but that it was equally probable that if the guides had missed him, they would have put themselves to no inconvenience on his account, but would have thought his ram-

pant impiety, profligacy, and audacity, properly punished by a night's confinement in the catacombs. The joke was rued when too late. The young man suffered a brain fever of the most violent and worst kind. He raved on his sick-bed, "Take away those skulls! remove those horrible bones! shut up those graves, or deprive me of sight!" Every object converted itself in his eye to a skeleton or a spectre; in his ear every sound was the tolling of that awful bell, or the more awful spoken words: "Caverns, show forth your dead! The muster-roll is calling! Let there be a death parade!"

The lancet, medicine, and skilful treatment, and assiduous care, slowly restored him to reason and to health; but from that time forward he was an altered, serious, reverential man. He had interred his last scoff and impious jest in the Roman catacomb. He could no longer laugh at death, or that which is beyond this brief and troublous life. The awe which had penetrated him, filled him, and overthrown his reason, did not all depart with the restoration of his reasoning faculties. He burned his

Système de la Nature, and betook himself to the study of very different books. His comrades rallied him, but they could not change him. Some seven years after, when killed in battle in Calabria, a copy of the Evangelists was found in his pocket.*

* I had this narrative, many years ago, from an aged priest at Rome.



BOOK III.

“ Piena di morti tutta la campagna.”

[Full of the dead this far-extending field.]

PETRARCA.

“ ’Tis long since death had the majority ;
Yet strange ; the living lay it not to heart.”

* * * * *

—— “ Why might you not
Tell us what ’tis to die ? Do the strict laws
Of your society forbid your speaking
Upon a point so nice ? I’ll ask no more.”

BLAIR’S GRAVE.

THE general description given in the preceding chapter may enable the reader to form a tolerably correct notion of the subterraneous world ; but to make this the clearer, I subjoin a brief account of one particular catacomb, namely that of St. Sebastian, which is the most spacious, the least injured by time, and the most frequently visited of any in Rome. Indeed, travellers very rarely extend their visits farther than the crypts of St. Sebastian ; and,

during the summer season, for fear of malaria fevers and other noxious vapours, entrance to other crypts is interdicted by the Roman police.

These catacombs open on the Via Appia, and the church called *San Sebastiano alle Catacombe* stands near its mouth. This is one of the seven principal churches of Rome, and is very rich in paintings, sculptures, and relics. The catacombs consist of three, and in some places of four, tiers or stories, the one running under another; and as the pozzolano is very dry and sandy, and apt to wear away or to fall in, in masses, these stories are in several places supported with brickwork. The ascents and descents are rather frequent, and many of the side passages both short and narrow. The explorer is frequently obliged to stoop considerably, and sometimes to crawl in these passages, the breadth of which seldom exceeds five feet. On both sides of the principal crypts, which vary in breadth from ten to twenty feet, are tombs or graves in tiers, like those which have been described: some of these graves are open and empty, others are walled up with brick or with tufo-stone, and others are

shut with a slab of marble or hard stone, upon which some inscription or symbol is usually engraved. In one of the cavities is a large stone coffin or sarcophagus; and above-ground, outside the church, there is another sarcophagus of white marble, which was taken out of these catacombs, and which has *bassi-rilievi* cut upon it, representing some passages of the Old and New Testaments. Other works of the same kind, discovered here, have been removed to the Vatican. In another niche there is a large antique urn, made of clay, quite sound and whole, and most probably a work of those greatest of all moulders of urns and vases, the Etruscans. Many other ancient urns were found, but these have either followed the sarcophagi to the Vatican, or have been dispersed in other museums and collections. In several parts of the catacombs are to be seen the remains of small bottles or phials, made of a coloured and rather opaque glass. These phials are stuck in the pozzolano or tufo which forms the walls or sides of the crypts; and in form they bear a close resemblance to the *Vasa Lachrymatoria*, in which the ancient heathens

preserved the tears shed at the funerals of their departed friends. As the same description of small glass vessels are found in the tombs of Etrurians—in tombs which were probably constructed before the siege of Troy, or twelve hundred years before the Christian era, some idea may be formed of the great antiquity of the art of glassmaking—an art which has by many writers been denied to the ancients, and about which long controversies have taken place. But if the little pictures found on some of these little vessels in the catacombs have been correctly interpreted, the early Roman Christians inherited the art, and Pancirollus would have had no right to put the making of glass in his list of lost inventions.* The figures of some of the glass phials clearly refer to the religion of the old Etruscans, about which we have only conjectures, and no posi-

* A quantity of glass has been disinterred at Pompeii, and found under the sand and volcanic *lapilli*; but it is all *coloured* glass. The writer of this little volume scarcely remembers to have seen any specimen of ancient glass that was perfectly *colourless*, or like that which we use in our windows.

tive knowledge. In the year 1716, Buonaroti, a celebrated Florentine senator, published a learned work on "Some fragments of ancient glass vessels ornamented with figures, and found in the cemeteries of Rome;" and other ingenious essays have since appeared on this interesting subject.

In these catacombs of St. Sebastian the graves of the Christian females are far apart from the graves of the men. This, with some exceptions, seems to be the case in the other subterranean cemeteries; but now and then the monumental inscription denotes that the remains of a husband and wife were interred together in the same tomb.

The catacombs of St. Sebastian are connected with, and may be said to form part of, the vast subterranean cemetery of St. Calixtus. It is believed that they were excavated in good part before the foundation of Rome, and that, at a subsequent period, the materials for building the first walls, by which the Eternal City was surrounded, were here quarried and dug. They are also believed to be the very first of the catacombs of which the Christians took pos-

session, or of which they made use for the interment of their dead. In the times of the emperor Alexander Severus, so favourable to Christianity, they had an undisturbed possession; and Calixtus, the bishop or pope of Rome, was allowed to carry on the work of ornamentation in these crypts. This was during the first half of the third century.

The learned Baronius has left a brief but spirited description of another particular catacomb, as he saw it himself soon after it became accessible. This was in the sixteenth century. "We have often visited," says he, "the cemetery of St. Priscilla, recently found again, and cleared out, situated on the Via Salaria, at the distance of three stone-throws from the city of Rome. It is so vast, and its crypts and passages are so numerous and so varied, that I cannot better characterize it than by calling it a subterranean city."* At the entrance there opens a great street, wider than the others, with which correspond, to the right and to the left, a multitude of other streets, which, in their

* Ann. Eccl.

turn, divide and branch off in different directions. At certain distances are found more spacious cavities or niches, like lesser squares or forums of the upper city of Rome; these served for the gathering together of the faithful, and they are decorated with the images of the saints. Openings over-head, to admit light, are also seen from time to time; but, for the most part, they are now blocked up. Much did Rome marvel when she learned that she had, at her very gates, buried and concealed towns, formerly colonies of persecuted Christians, and now peopled only by tombs; and she the better comprehended that which she read in ancient writings, and that which she had seen in other catacombs, of which only portions could be as yet penetrated.

We may now proceed to the inscriptions and works of Christian art, of which the crypts of St. Priscilla, St. Sebastian, and St. Agnes are principal repositories, but of which specimens, more or less perfect and interesting, are to be found in all these catacombs.

It has been said, that the oratories or chapels are prototypes of the first Christian churches

built above-ground. In many cases the resemblance, making allowance for the difference of dimensions, is perfect. The remarkable and well-known church of Saints Cosmo and Damian, situated in the Roman Forum, is, in form and disposition, nothing more than a reproduction of the subterranean church of St. Hermes, in the cemetery of that name, under the Via Salaria. Though the tufo which forms the roof of these chapels is generally hollowed into a cupola form, this is not always the case, it being sometimes left flat, and at other times only slightly arched. In the vast multitude of these confined places of worship, sunk in the bowels of the earth, nearly every variety of shape under the roof is detected: some of them are spherical, some hemispherical, some triangular, some pentagonal, some octagonal, and some perfectly square. The form adopted was evidently made to depend upon the excavations which the Christians found already existing, and which the heathens had cut in a very different intention, and without the remotest thought of oratories or baptisteries. Perhaps,

however, the most prevailing shape is the oblong square, terminating towards the east in a semicircle, and having on each of its sides small semicircular niches. The altar stands as it now does in our churches, but it is usually the hollowed tomb of some saint or early Christian, covered with stone. In front of the altar there is nearly always a low stone balustrade, to prevent the too near approach of the congregation. Not unfrequently the tufo at the sides of the chapel has been cut into broad, low *gradini*, or steps, rising about three feet above the floor. The cupola, or the flat roof, is very frequently supported by brickwork, or by tufo columns covered with stucco, and ornamented with allegorical paintings. In some instances, as in an oratory in the catacombs under the Via Latina, the columns are decorated with encircling vines and vine-leaves, exactly in the style of those which have been found in Hadrian's Villa at Tivoli. Both roof and walls are frequently found covered with stucco and paintings; but few of the paintings seem to be of an earlier date than the fourth

century; and some of them, particularly those nearest to the mouths of the catacombs, cannot safely be referred to a period more remote than the sixteenth century, when they were the fruit of a reawakened interest. In many places this pictured or moulded stucco has fallen almost entirely from the walls; but patches of a thin white coating denote where it has been. Quite in recent days, irreverent hands have cut or torn away many pieces of these subterranean church pictures, to carry them off as *curiosities*; while other portions have been injured by that prevalent and abominable practice of cutting and scrawling names and dates.

The poor primitive Christians were certainly not eminent artists, and their defective powers of execution, as well as the simplicity of their worship, may account for their never having attempted groups of figures, or the delineation of anything divine or sublimely holy. Whether in the oratories, or upon their tombs, these earliest of the Christians confined themselves to the most simple single figures—as to that of a *fossor* or grave-digger, or to the image of a dove bearing an olive-branch, or to a branch

of a palm-tree, denoting martyrdom, or to some animal indicating the name of the dead.

A recent English writer says:—" Besides other tokens of poverty and ignorance, you find ever and anon, upon a tombstone, the rude effigy of some animal. Here is a lion on a stone. What does it mean? Looking at the epitaph, you find that the occupant of that grave was called Leo, or Lion: his relatives were too ignorant to read his name, but they could discover his grave by the lion. Here, on another, you find an ass: looking to the inscription, it proves that a person named Onager had there his resting-place; and as *onager* means 'a wild ass,' his friends, who could not read, would find his grave by the picture that answered to his name. Here you find the tomb of Porcella, a name which, in ears unacquainted with Latin, would sound very like the name of a young lady; but it happens that, in Latin, *porcella* means 'a little pig,' and that the relations of Porcella might be under no doubt as to the site of her tomb, the inscription is accompanied by a pig. These signs tell us, with sufficient evidence, that among

those who slumbered beneath those stones, there were 'not many mighty, not many noble.' ”*

On some of these primitive tombs we find the symbol of a ship in full sail, called by the early Christian writers the “Heavenward-bound ship;” but this is an emblem frequently found on the tombs of Pompeii. The emblem, however, had very different significations: with the heathen it merely denoted the rapid passage of human life; with the hopeful Christian it indicated a transition to an unseen but happier world. The figure of the anchor, the emblem of firmness and constancy, as also of hope, is of frequent occurrence. On other tombs we find the figure of the dolphin, sometimes with, and sometimes without, the ponderous anchor. The dolphin, too, is emblematical. “It is the hieroglyphic of celerity, being swifter than other animals. . . . The swiftest animal conjoined with that heavy body,

* Rev. William Arthur. “The Church and the Catacombs, a Lecture.” London, 1850. Mr. Arthur has followed and abridged Dr. Charles Maitland’s “Church in the Catacombs.”

implying that common moral, *festina lente*, and that celerity should always be compared with cunctation.”*

But the most common of all the emblems is the simple figure of a fish. At first sight this does not seem to symbolize anything; but you find, under the figure, or upon some other tombstone without any figure, the Greek word ἰχθὺς, “a fish.” Now this word consists of letters which form the initials of the Greek words signifying “Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour.” This token of their faith, while known to the early Christians, would be unintelligible to their enemies and persecutors. This one word offered an abbreviation of the name and descriptive titles of their Lord and Saviour. And, moreover, the fish, born in the water, was regarded as a symbol of the Christian’s regeneration in baptism. The figure of the fish is repeated on the tombs in the catacombs at Naples, and it is by far the most common of all the figures discovered in the most ancient of the temples and cemeteries of the Greeks and some other Christians of the Eastern Church.

* Sir Thomas Browne.

Some of the most ancient tombs in the catacombs bear the sign of the cross; but instead of being plain, or the figure of a simple cross, the upper part of it is generally rounded so as to resemble our letter P, which corresponds to the letter in Greek which is pronounced like our R. Moreover, you find that the more ancient tombs have not merely the cross rounded at the top, but also a mark exactly like an X, with a P run up the centre of it. This soon explains itself. The Greek letter X (Ch) resembles our X, and is the first letter in the word Christ. The Greek letter P (R) resembles our P, and is the second letter in that name. The sign, therefore, of the X with the P run up its centre, was precisely the same as if we, for the name of Christ, wrote the abbreviation Chr, placing the *r* between the *c* and the *h*. It was not properly a symbol of anything, but simply a contracted name—a monogram. Of this we have further confirmation in the fact that we use the same sign as a contraction of the word Christ; for we write Xtian for Christian, and Xmas for Christmas.

By slow degrees, as persecution ceased, as

the rich and great of Rome and the rest of Italy received baptism, and as emperors themselves embraced and adhered to the faith which had been first confessed by none but the poorest and lowliest of the land—when Christianity became the established and dominant religion of the Roman empire, whether in the east or in the west, and of nearly all the colonies and dependencies of that empire—when Pagan rites were suppressed, and when by temporal and human law the oracles became dumb, the temples deserted,* the flamens and priests silent,

* At first, many of the Christians were eager for the entire destruction of the heathen temples, and no doubt many were then destroyed ; but St. Augustine, who lived about the year 400, and Pope Gregory the Great, who lived about two centuries later, emphatically recommended that they should be converted into Christian churches. “The temples of the idols,” said Gregory, “are by no means to be destroyed, but only the idols that are in them ; afterwards let the temples be sprinkled with holy water, and furnished with relics, and let altars be built in them. If those fanes be well built, it is highly proper they should be converted from the worship of devils to that of the true God ; so that the people, seeing their temples left standing, may repair to the accustomed places, and thus be the more readily brought to a conviction of their error, and to a devout knowledge and sincere worship of the one God.” (Epp. xi. 76.) If, during the succeeding

and the deities of the mythology all uncrowned and cast out,—Christian art developed itself, and aspired to delineate objects which it had not previously attempted; garlands and festoons of flowers began to appear on the roofs of the oratories and on the tombs. The laurel wreath—

“The laurel garland worn on holiday,”

was carved on the corners of the sarcophagi, and the figure of the peacock, with outspread tail, was cut on the slabs. The figure of a lamb was carved at the foot of the cross, and both sculptors and painters represented the Good Shepherd under the figure of a man wearing nothing but a short tunic, descending from the neck to the knees, and carrying a sheep or lamb on his shoulders. Evidently after a long interval, the figures of saints were painted in the oratories, or sculptured on their graves, or over the spots where their remains had rested before their translation to the

ten centuries, the opinions of Gregory had prevailed, the noble monuments of antiquity would not be so imperfect and so scarce as we now find them.

churches of Rome. And again, another long interval appears to have elapsed ere groups of figures were attempted, or ere artists had the presumption to aim at the representation of the Divinity, or even of the Saviour's humanity. Even when they came to represent subjects from the Old and New Testaments, and to form groups of figures, the visible presence of the Eternal is merely indicated and shadowed. Thus, in a bas-relief on a sarcophagus of Moses receiving the Law, there is a hand projecting from clouds; the intention evidently being to suggest the idea of God, and to avoid the profanity of attempting his image. On another bas-relief, representing Abraham offering up his son Isaac, there also appears, on the side of the Holiest, a hand, and nothing more. This reverence, this awe, this careful avoidance of a subject—God the Father—which never ought to have been attempted by mortal hands, seems to have prevailed in these catacombs until the eleventh or twelfth century. In after-ages the artists took more daring flights. It was also at this period, when the catacombs were visited by popes, emperors, and kings, and

when wealth was lavished upon them, that martyrdoms of saints, groups of the Holy Family in Egypt, and separate figures of the Virgin Mary, began to appear in these caverns. There then followed the long period of neglect; and it is to the reopening of the catacombs, in the sixteenth century, that we must refer nearly all the *elaborate* paintings which are found on the walls. These paintings are, for the most part, near the mouths, or in the best-lighted portions of the crypts. Their style affords the most positive assurance that they were painted after the *renaissance* of art. They represent martyrdoms and miracles, passages from the lives of Christians, of both sexes, who have been canonized by the Church of Rome. The preceding painters, or such of them as had attempted groups and composition, confined themselves almost exclusively to biblical subjects, and to subjects in the New Testament. Those they most frequently handled were,—

Adam and Eve in Paradise.

Noah and the Ark.

Abraham sacrificing Isaac.

Moses striking the Rock of Horeb.

David with the Sling in his Hand.

Elias ascending into Heaven.

The Three Israelites cast into the Furnace.

Daniel in the Lions' Den.

Jesus, on the Knees of the Virgin Mother,
receiving the Presents of the Three Magi.

Jesus with the Doctors.

With his Disciples.

The Miracle of the Loaves and Fishes.

Curing the Paralytic.

Restoring Sight to the Blind.

Lazarus Rising from the Dead.

Jesus as the Good Shepherd.

The figure of the Good Shepherd, bearing a lamb on his shoulders, is, as we have said, the favourite subject. It recurs oftener than any other, and usually occupies the most conspicuous place. Some of these decorations give a pleasing picture of the manners of the times. In one of them, the Good Shepherd appears in the centre of a circle; in the corners of the vaulted ceiling are four figures of angels, and at the sides are the four Seasons. Winter is represented by a man holding some sticks in his right hand, which is extended towards a

fire; in his left he bears a lighted torch: a withered tree stands in the background. Spring is signified by a boy on one knee, supporting a lamb with one hand, and holding a lily in the other: the scene is a garden with walks; near the border of one of these walks stands a tree in full foliage. Summer appears as a man in a tunic, with a round hat on his head, in the act of reaping; the sickle is precisely of the same form as that used in England. Autumn is a youth applying a ladder to a tree, round which twines a luxuriant vine. The several compartments are divided by garlands and arabesques.

In another picture, the Good Shepherd, with the ancient, classical, and as yet unchanged, crook, is walking in the foreground, and a flock of sheep is following him in the distance. "In the East, the shepherds used to go before their sheep; to which our blessed Saviour alludes, 'My sheep hear my voice and follow me;' but our shepherds are forced to drive them, and affright them with dogs and noises: it were better if themselves did go before."*

* Jeremy Taylor. "The Minister's Duty."

I have frequently seen, in the Asiatic provinces of Turkey, and in some of the larger of the Greek islands, a shepherd thus followed by his flock, the sheep quickened in their pace, and commanded solely by his voice. But this is only one of innumerable instances in which the language and metaphors of Scripture are forcibly recalled to the mind of the Eastern traveller.

The costume of these early catacomb pictures is often very curious, as showing the antiquity of many articles of dress and ornament still in common use throughout Southern Italy. We find the sugar-loafed hat, the drooping cap, the tunica, the trousers loose and open at the knee, the sandal, and the inseparable sash or girdle, just as they are used now by the peasantry. Ploughs, spades, mattocks, and other agricultural implements, are exactly like those which are still in use. A procession of men and boys carrying olive-branches, and bearing their tools on their shoulders,—as if labour were finished, and some pleasure at hand,—might be taken for a modern picture. On the approach of Easter, the Nea-

politan peasants leave off work, and repair to their village homes,—often at a considerable distance,—carrying their tools, and wearing olive-branches in their hats. I have met many such groups in the Campania Felice, in the country between Salerno and Pæstum, in Calabria, in the Abruzzi, in Apulia, and in all parts of the kingdom of Naples; and I never could pass one of them without a lively, tender feeling of pleasure. They gave a serene, holy Easter aspect and atmosphere to the season, and exercised a silent, deep, soothing influence on mind, body, and soul,—an influence to be felt, but not to be described. Our northern clime is uncongenial to the picturesque; the olive is a tree unknown to our soil, and the merest twig of olive is a divine poem in itself; yet still, means might be devised for marking to the eye the approach of our holy seasons, and for giving a more touching outward beauty to their celebration. Indeed, such means were not unfamiliar to the people in the olden time; but now, even the simple sylvan method of distinguishing Palm Sunday, seems to be going out of use, and little or nothing is left us

except the holly-branch and its scarlet berries at Christmas time.

In the sculptures on the sarcophagi, these scriptural subjects are somewhat varied, for we find,—

The Death of Abel.

The Passage of the Red Sea.

The Vision of Ezekiel.

Jonas Cast on Shore by the Whale.

And a few other subjects.

The history of Jonas seems to be reproduced more frequently than any other. It symbolized the resurrection, and illustrated the words spoken by our Saviour himself, who had repeatedly said, that his body would remain three days in the tomb, as that of Jonas had been three days in the stomach of the monstrous fish.

Legendary art rose at a period long posterior to these scriptural paintings and sculptures; the miracles and martyrdoms of the saints of the Church of Rome are all of a comparatively modern date. The style and execution alone are, to an instructed, well practised eye, almost proof enough. Yet great care

is required. A rude artisan of the first or second century, or any artist between the third century and the fourteenth, could never introduce the style, and grace, and composition, of a painter or a sculptor of the fifteenth century; but an ignorant, bad artist of the fifteenth or any later century, may often produce a work, stiff, cold, angular, and rude enough to be mistaken for a production of the darkest ages of art.

On the whole, it may be safely assumed, that the catacombs destined to the sepulchre of the first Christians, for long periods peopled by martyrs, decorated during the persecutions of the Church, and under the immediate dominion of sad thoughts and agonizing duties, do really offer on all sides nothing but heroism in the historical pictures, and in the purely ornamental part, nothing but graceful and cheering subjects; as representations of the vintage, of pastoral scenes, of agapes or love-feasts, of fruits, flowers, palm-branches, laurel crowns, lambs, doves, and does; in a word, nothing but what suggests a feeling of joyous innocence,—such as the world knew when it was young,—

and charity, such as the Lamb of God first brought into the world. Here are no figures agonizing upon the cross,—no pictures of the Cross and Passion, the agony and bloody sweat, the precious death and burial. For the crucifixion, you must go to other cemeteries, which were not decorated in the first ages of Christianity. In the midst of their agitated lives, and in contemplation of a painful death, these first converts of the Faith regarded the grave only as a sure and short road to eternal happiness. Far from associating with it images of torture and horror, they endeavoured to enliven the tomb with bright, cheerful colours,—to present death under the most agreeable symbols, to wreath it with foliage and flowers. In these dark crypts, among all these funereal fragments and remnants of the dead, you see no sinister symbol, no image of distress and mourning, no sign of resentment, no expression of hatred or vengeance; on the contrary, all these objects breathe sentiments of composure, gentleness, affection, and brotherly love.

The same system prevailed in the decorations of the first churches which the Christians were

allowed to build above-ground. St. Jerome tells us how the priest Nepotian decorated the interior of his churches with flowers, foliage, lilies, and the gay branches of the vine. Also, in those first churches, when pictures were attempted upon the walls or cupolas, the subjects were all taken from holy writ. The painters who worked above-ground, had the same source of inspiration as the artists who decorated these catacombs; and that source was the BIBLE.

Most of the marble sarcophagi, and perhaps all of the urns and vases which have been dug up by hundreds, and removed to the different churches of Rome, or sold, and scattered over Europe, were indisputably the works of unconverted Romans and Greeks. This is sufficiently demonstrated by the subjects traced upon them; such as Bacchus surrounded by Cupids and the Four Seasons, a Meeting of Fauns and Satyrs, the Forge of Vulcan, the Fable of Marsyas, the Desertion of Ariadne, the Return of Ulysses, etc. The early Christians would not have presumed to appropriate to their dead the sepulchres of their illustrious or wealthy prede-

cessors ; and it is more than probable that they would feel a repugnance in placing the remains of their brethren in the coffins of unbelievers. In all probability, it was not until after the time of Constantine that the sarcophagi were appropriated and sanctified to their use, not by defacing the ancient sculpture, but by carving on the marble some Christian symbol and short epitaph. Thus, in the catacomb of St. Agnes, on a sarcophagus ornamented with mythological subjects, are cut these words,—

AVR. AGAPETILLA.

ANCILLA DEI.

[Aurelia Agapetilla. Servant of God.]

Some of the fonts in the baptisteries are equally ancient and pagan. Even on these the mythological or poetical subjects were not obliterated. Cupids were left to sport, Pan and his pipes, the Nymphs and their tymbals, were left unbroken ; even the sacrificial procession and the altar of the gods were left as they were found, the Christians merely giving them holiness by pouring the baptismal water into them, and marking them with the simple figure of

the cross. On one of the fonts, long since removed to the Vatican, there is an ancient sacrifice gracefully sculptured. A fair female figure has the left hand on the garlanded neck of a heifer, and with her right hand she holds a patera over the gentle creature's horns.

“ Ipsa tenens dextra pateram pulcherrima Dido,
Candentis vaccæ media inter cornua fundit.” *

[O'er the white heifer's horns the beauteous queen
Holds the rich plate and pours the wine between.]

Even the thrones on which the first Roman bishops sat, and the very altars in these crypts, are often found decorated with *bassi-rilievi* of the profane times.

This adaptation of ancient marbles for Christian purposes spread to every part of Europe, where such remains of the Greeks or Romans were discovered. The body of the emperor Charlemagne was deposited in a Roman sarcophagus, on which was sculptured the Rape of Proserpine. An old French prelate, Honoratus, bishop of Arles, who was afterwards canonized, was interred in a sarcophagus, which was orna-

* *Æn.* iv. 60.

mented with a pagan procession. Andeol, another French martyr and saint, occupied the marble coffin of an unconverted Roman, which was inscribed with the words, TID. JUL. VALE-RIANUS. At Pisa, a sarcophagus, sculptured with the subject of Phædra and Hippolytus, served as the coffin of the mother of the famous Countess Matilda. This monument was for a long time built up in the wall of the façade of the cathedral. In the thirteenth century, Nicholas of Pisa devoted great attention to it, studied its figures and groups, and made it contribute somewhat to the slow but gradual new birth of art. This monument is now preserved in the Campo Santo, or old cemetery of Pisa, a vast funereal museum, where all sorts of monuments of profane antiquity,—Etruscan, Grecian, and Roman,—urns and sarcophagi of all forms and sizes,—have been laid under contribution by Christians of all ages.

It is in the Campo Santo of Pisa (otherwise deeply interesting, as it contains wall-paintings by Giotto and the earliest Italian artists), in the museum of the Vatican, and in the old churches of Rome, Florence, Naples, and the

other cities of Italy, that these *bassi-rilievi* are to be studied. Collectively, they exercised a great interest upon art at its *renaissance*. The Christians have been but too often accused of destroying the beautiful monuments of Pagan antiquity ; yet, without their care of them—perhaps without their appropriation of them to their own holy uses—few or none of the sarcophagi and urns would have survived the destruction of the barbarous times, or have remained undefaced to charm us with their graceful forms, and their speaking illustrations of the poets of classical antiquity. In the West, at least, the Church preserved far more than she destroyed. She was the conservatress of old, and the mother of new art.

But if the emblems, left by the early Christians in these gloomy recesses, were placid, and even joy-inspiring, overlaid as they are by other objects, they cannot now dissipate the gloom and horrors of the place.

“ Ora sen’ va per uno stretto calle,
Tra ’l muro della terra.” *

* Dante. “Inferno.”

[Onward we go, through narrow pathways dark,
Between the walls of earth.]

From this passage we merge into others, narrower and darker, and still graves,—graves on either side of us. We leave the crypts which the believers have filled, and plunge among the graves of Etruscans and Romans. Skulls and bones bleached into an unnatural whiteness, calcined as it were by time and the action of that unvarying warm, dry atmosphere, bestrew our path, or glare at us from *puticuli* under our feet, or from the cavities in the walls, as we depress or elevate our torches. We are indeed “set down in the midst of the valley which is full of bones,” and the bones be “very dry.” An inspired Ezekiel might call upon the sinews and the flesh to come up upon these bones, and to the skin to cover them above; and he might see these skeletons reanimated, breathing and standing up upon their feet, “an exceeding great army.” But such visions are not to us, nor (save in Scripture) are they *for* us. These bones must remain sinewless, fleshless, skinless, until the end of mortal time—dry

bones, and nothing more, except as a *memento mori*.

But in this solemn Necropolis, in this valley of Jehoshaphat, in this city, or world of the dead, from twelve hundred years before the coming of our Saviour to twelve hundred years after that advent, questions might arise in the mind of a poor, but not incurious layman, though separated by the gulf of time from the days of direct inspiration, prophecy, and miracle—questions to be put to the hoary Etruscans, who were a great and civilized people (long before the times of Saul and of David) when Jephtha was a ruler in Israel; to the Romans of the first confederacy, to the Romans of the kingly Tarquins, to the Romans of the earlier republic and the latter republic; the contemporaries of the Cincinnati, the Scipios, and Cicero; to the Romans of the Cæsars, and the princes who succeeded them on the imperial despotic throne; to the first Christian converts in the reign of Tiberius, to the Christians who witnessed the full triumph of their faith under Constantine, down to those who lived and died in the dark uncertain ages between the reign

of Constantine and the mysterious period when the catacombs ceased to be used as places of interments.

O Etruscans, lying in heaps here, in this innermost chamber, can none of you put forth a voice to tell us what manner of men ye were? Can none of you give us, however brief, a true history of Italy before the dominion of the Romans, instead of the learned, and sometimes fantastic, speculations we possess? What were your systems of philosophy? What were your varying creeds? What was your fixed religious belief? Or had you none? Have we rightly interpreted your sculptures, your pictured vases, your symbols, and hieroglyphics? Have the learned read these things aright, in deducing from them that the esoteric classes among you, if not the rest, had aspirations loftier than their heathen contemporaries, and could indulge in visions of the soul's immortality, and of the existence of a world beyond the grave—a world beautiful, happy, eternal? Or have the learned theorized and dreamed? Have your emblems been misinterpreted? Have your tombs been broken open and rummaged in vain; or in vain

in as much as relates to any knowledge of your religious tenets? Was your futurity anything less or more than the Hades and Elysian fields of those who groped after you in a world unilluminated by divine revelation? What was your civil polity, what your form of government, and how and when varied? Did you make Utopias of your own, and dream of the perfectibility of man and of human happiness to be effected by law-making, by cramped theories, and other human devices? By means like these, did you—as men, for whom there is less excuse, have continued to do in all time—contemplate the conversion of this probationary world into a paradise of bliss? Passed you through the common and inevitable grades, from republic to anarchy, from anarchy to despotism, the *euthanasia* of all experimentalists in politics; the doomed, unvarying end of all peoples and governments? Kings at one period you certainly had, for we have ransacked their tombs; and if their apparently well-preserved bodies and robes of majesty crumbled into dust upon being exposed to sun and air, their royal crowns of glittering gold, and their

golden sceptres, remained solid and entire in our hands. What were the powers of this most ancient and vanished dynasty? What the periods of their reigns; what the extent of their dominions? Have we not wrongly mapped the limits of the old Etruria? Besides Tuscany, and the country to the right bank of the Tiber, did not those Etruscan monarchs possess all that lies between the Tiber and the Liris, and between the Liris and the grottos of old Cumæ? And whence did you originally derive your arts and civilization? Was it from beyond the Indian Ocean, from the banks of the Indus, or the Hydaspes, and those other fabulous streams, or from Persia or Assyria, or from Phœnicia, or from the upper valley of the Nile, or from the Delta of Egypt, or from the ancient, fair, and tomb-abounding Lycia, where modern travellers have brought to light graves, sculptures, and inscriptions, which bear a strong family resemblance to those found in Etruria? Or was there not an intermediate stage? In the broad Mediterranean, between the shores of Asia and the shores of Greece and Italy, in Cyprus, in Crete, in

Samos, in Melos, in nearly all the glittering islands of the Cyclades, crypts and tombs like yours, statues, rilievi, terra-cottas, and implements like yours, have been discovered, as well as inscriptions resembling yours, and to the full as unintelligible. Cannot one gentle voice among you give a key to these stone-engraven records, and to the other mysteries of your race and history which the mind yearns to know? Your barbarous conquerors, the first Romans, burned or otherwise destroyed all that which ought to have been preserved as more precious than gold. Your codes, your books are all gone—not so much as a scrap of them is left. What was in them? Had you not moralists, historians, poets, tragedians, writers on agriculture, on architecture, and on the other arts and sciences which in practice you carried to so high a perfection? In what degree were Ennius and Varro and the other primitive fathers of Roman literature indebted to you?

O Romans!—ancients to us, but to the Etruscans moderns—ye who were heaped here were of the despised of the earth, slaves or

felons in the mass; but were there not, at every period, some one or two among you superior in intellect, and not debarred from the opportunities of acquiring knowledge of what was passing or being said in the days of your brief existence upon earth? Æsop was but a slave. In all times the class *serviles* had its men of observation and of genius. From this *puticulus*, filled with hundreds of old Roman dead, I select three skulls. In each, the brow is broad and lofty, and the whole occiput remote, and repugnant to the gross, stupid, animal forms. Here ought to have been the residences of intellect and wit,—or Gall and Spurzheim are impostors, and their science a pretence and a sham. Here, from other crowded receptacles, are more crania, not inferior to the three. Speak, tongueless mouths! Separate the fables from the facts of your early history; tell us how to read the first books of Livy; show what was really mythical, and what fact. Give us the meanings of the myths. Have we not gone too far in rejecting the traditions which must form a considerable portion of the history of all nations? Can none

of you tell us somewhat of the lost treasures of antiquity — treasures which were extant and perfect during the existence of some of you upon earth? Where are the missing books of Pliny and of Livy? Or what were their contents? Where all that is wanting of the Greek poets, tragedians, orators, and historians? Where are the four hundred and ninety-eight volumes of Varro? for, out of the five hundred he wrote, only two have descended to us. How is it that out of all that old Ennius wrote in tragedy, comedy, annals, and satires, we possess nothing but a few short extracts, embalmed in the works of later writers? Where are the lost plays of Plautus and Terence, and all the lost works of early Roman literature, of which we only know enough to make us eager for their recovery? Can none detail the circumstances which attended the political transitions of the commonwealth and the empire? Have not the crimes of even the worst of the emperors been monstrously exaggerated by political hatred and rhetorical art? Were not the Romans under the empire, like the Italians of our present day, vindictive and violent;—

on all political subjects, addicted to over-colouring, merciless when the fame of a political enemy was in their hands, and resolute never to quit their political foe until they had charged him with every imaginable and unimaginable vice, and converted him into a demon? Tell us, for the honour of human nature, that Tacitus, Suetonius, and Juvenal, were especially guilty of this exaggeration of vice. Tell us, for the dearer honour of women, who were wives and mothers, that in the very worst time, female wickedness and depravity halted far short of Juvenal's seventh satire.

Christians! ye who lived in the infancy of our faith, in the days when disciples of our Lord were yet walking the earth, what were the facts of your first conversion, and what the unadorned history of the first martyrs interred in these caverns? Tell us that St. Peter, as well as St. Paul, was indubitably at Rome; that you saw both these saints in the flesh, and heard from their own lips their rapt, inspired eloquence. Ye of later dates, give some explanation, clearer than any we possess, of the history of the Church from the first to the

twelfth century. Can none of you raise up some corner of the dark curtain which conceals so large a portion of the middle ages, when, of a certainty, the world drank copiously at the fountains of Belief, and men were not so barbarous as the conceit and encyclopædism of the eighteenth century delighted in representing them.

But, Etruscans, Romans, Christians, all are silent, mute as the dead must be. Records and monuments have perished, and no re-animated voice will speak of the remote past. Let us then, in literary discussion, be modest and diffident, not positive, dogmatical, and presumptuous. That which is built up on a speculative theory this year, may be overthrown by speculation and theory the next. Where doubts exist, let us give them in favour of the dead, as we give them in favour of the living in our courts of law. In matters more inward, and far more important to us—the history of the early confessors and the growth of our Church—let us incline rather to an easy belief than to a stern denial.

BOOK IV.

“In questo fondo della trista conca.”

[Even at the bottom of this dismal hollow.]

DANTE—*Inferno*, canto ix.

“Ex tenebris lux.”—[Light out of darkness.]

—— “Un sasso

Che distingua le sue delle infinite ossa.”

—— [A stone

To mark his grave where bones are infinite.]

UGO FOSCOLO—*I Sepolcri*.

“Come, my people, shut thy doors about thee. Enter into thy chamber, hide thyself for a little while, until this indignation be overpast.”—*Isaiah*.

FAR more interesting and affecting than the pictured walls and sculptured sarcophagi, are the early epitaphs and lapidary inscriptions found in the catacombs.

The number of these inscriptions which have been copied, collected, and published by Bosio, Aringhi, Boldetti, and others, is prodigious; and yet there remain many thousands (of which some are broken or defaced) which have never

been noticed by authors or artists. One thing, which strikes even a hasty observer, is the very large share which females have in these epitaphs and records of martyrdom. The fair, the young, the innocent, and now and then the high-born, appear among the first of the victims. It has been well said, that from the very times of its first promulgation, down to the present day, Christianity has received its most constant tribute from women. Indeed, its propagation was much dependent on the ministry of females, on the gentle persuasions and indoor exertions and teachings of wives and mothers. The early Christian female died, but did not apostatize: the guilt incurred by the rougher and hardier sex was most rarely contracted by her.

“ *She* ne’er with treach’rous kiss her Saviour stung,
Nor e’er denied him with unholy tongue :
She, when Apostles shrank, could danger brave,
Last at his cross, and earliest at his grave !”*

The total absence of all the vindictive or angry passions in this world beneath the world has been dwelt upon already. The inscriptions

* “Woman,” a Poem, by the author of “The Heroine” (Mr. Barrett), A.D. 1818.

—meaning the earliest ones—are nothing but a homily of peace. Upon these tombs peace is the key-note, and the one predominant word. In one case or another, that holy noun encounters you whichever way you turn.

PAX! PAX! PAX!

[Peace! Peace! Peace!]

IN PACE! IN PACE! IN PACE!

[In Peace! In Peace! In Peace!]

The verb *to sleep* is also of frequent occurrence; but it is always so employed as to forebode the everlasting waking. Everywhere you meet the proof that the body was laid down by these primitive Christians with a firm belief in the peace of the soul in the grave, and in its immortality beyond the grave. Here are a few specimens :—

VICTORIA DORMIT.

[Victoria sleeps.]

SATVRNINA DORMIT IN PACE.

[Saturnina sleeps in peace.]

ZOTICUS HIC
AD DORMIENDUM.

[Zoticus is here to sleep.]

GALLA IN PACE.

[Galla in peace.]

RECESSIT SABBATIA IN SOMNO PACIS.

P. AN. XXVII.

[Sabbatia has retired in the sleep of peace, being about
twenty-eight years old.]PRIMA VIVIS IN GLORIA DEI ET IN PACE
DOMINI NOSTRI.[Prima, thou livest in the glory of God and in the peace of
the Lord.]DOMITIANUS ANIMA SIMPLEX
DORMIT IN PACE.

[Domitian, innocent soul, sleeps in peace.]

POMPIANUS VIVIT IN PACE.

[Pompianus . . . lives in peace.]

ANTONIA ANIMA DULCIS IN PACE.

. . . . DEUS REFRIGERET. . . .

[Antonia, sweet soul, in peace. May God refresh her.]

JULIÆ . AGAPENI.

CONJUGI DVLCISSIME, QUE VIXIT ANNIS XLV M. III. D. III
VID. ET MECVM ANNIS. XXI. LÆTA IN PACE.[To Julia Agapena, my dearest wife, who lived forty-five years,
three months, and three days, and was with me twenty-one
years. Rejoicing in peace.]

HIC IN PACE REQVIESCIT LAVRENTIA. L.F.
QVE CREDIDIT RESVRRECTIONEM.

[Here lies in peace Laurentia, daughter of Lucius, who
believed in the Resurrection.]

SALONICE ISPIRITVS
TVVS IN BONO.

[Salonice, thy soul is in Bliss.]

VLPIA VIVA SIS CVM FRATRIBVS TVIS,
[Ulpia, mayest thou live with thy brothers.]

JVSTVS CUM SCIS XPO MEDIANTE
RESURGET.

[Justus, who will rise with the saints through Christ.]

SABBATI DULCIS
ANIMA PETE ET ROGA
PRO FRATRES ET
SODALES TUOS.

[Sabbatus, sweet soul, supplicate and pray for thy brothers
and thy friends.]

ATTICE SPIRITUS TVVS
IN BONO ORA PRO PAREN-
TIBUS TVIS.

[Atticus, blessed soul, pray for thy parents.]

JOVIANUS VIBET IN DEO ET ROGAT.

[Jovianus lives in God and prays.]

REGINA VIBAS
IN DOMINE
ZESV.

[Regina, mayest thou live in the Lord Jesus.]

DEO SANC XRO UN
LUC TECUM PACE.

[God Holy Christ, only light, with thee in peace.]

PASCASO INNOCEN
TI IN PACE XR.

[To the innocent Pascasius in peace.]

PRIMA VIVIS IN GLORIA DEI ET
IN PACE DOMIN. NOSTR. XR.

[Prima, thou livest in the glory of God and in the peace of
our Lord Christ.]

VITALIANUS MAGISTER MILITUM
QUIESCIT IN DOMINO
ZESV. VIII KAL
APRILIS.

[Vitalianus, a military commander, rests in the Lord Jesus.
The 9th of the Kalends of April.]

ARETHUSA DORMIT
IN DEO.

[Arethusa sleeps in God.]

DORMIT SED
VIVET.

[Sleeps but Lives.]

LUCIUS DORMIT ET VIVET
IN PACE XO.

[Lucius sleeps and lives in the peace of Christ.]

JULIÆ INNOC. ET DULCIS
MATER SUA
SPERANS.

[To Julia, the innocent and sweet, her mother hoping.]

The touching brevity of these primitive inscriptions presents a striking contrast to the prolixity and inflation of most modern epitaphs. For lessons in this style of composition, the epitaph-writer may be advantageously referred to the Roman catacombs, or to the volumes of Bosio and Aringhi.

Many of these inscriptions testify strong family affections, a warm love of friends, and a

deep veneration for those that died the death of martyrs. Some of the marbles denote that a vault was purchased by Julius, or Caius, or Sempronius, for himself, his dearest wife, and his dear children, in order that they might sleep together in peace. Others denote that the vault was purchased for the interment of some dear friends, who had suffered and died, but in the knowledge that they were dearly beloved, and would not be forgotten. In some shape or other, this sentiment of tender affection is constantly occurring. Let us not doubt that it soothed the pangs of the departing.

“To hope, to think, that we are dear,
Must change to bliss the deepest woe,
The saddest hour with rapture cheer,
And wake an angel's joy below.”*

Here is the brief inscription over a grave
which one fair friend raised to another :

ÆLIA BICTORI
NA POSUIT
AVRELIAE
PROBÆ.

[Elia Victorina placed this stone to Aurelia Proba.]

* Mrs. J. A. Sarjant. “Sunday Companion.”

On the right of this inscription is engraved the figure of a lamb, the symbol of gentleness and patience; on the left there is the peacock, which appears to have been emblematical of the resurrection.

On many of the tombs, instead of the peacock, we find the common cock, *gallus*. This figure denoted to the first Christians the necessity of vigilance, and had reference to the words spoken by our Saviour to St. Peter. The dove and the olive-branch are still more frequent.

BENEMERENTI FILIO CAL
PURNIO PARENTES
FECERUNT
QUI VIXIT ANN. V. M. VIII
D. X. DECESSIT IN PACE
XIII. KAL. JUN.

[To their deserving son Calpurnius, his parents made this, who lived five years, eight months, and ten days, and departed in peace on the 13th of June.]

On either side, this inscription is flanked by a dove carrying the olive-branch in its beak. Under the inscription is the figure of a vase,

surmounted by the monogram of our Saviour. The laurel wreath and the olive crown were not always reserved for martyrs: we find, both on the tombs of the young and innocent:—

RESPECTUS QUI VIXIT

ANN. V. ET MENSES

VIII. DORMIT

IN PACE.

[Respectus, who lived five years and eight months, sleeps in peace.]

Here a crown of laurels surrounds the inscription, and a dove and a crown of olives are placed beneath.

The graves of infants are commonly decorated with the representation of a dove, or a lamb, or a rosebud. On these the inscriptions, though not in so many words, breathe the sentiment of the lines on an infant's tombstone in the churchyard of All Saints, near St. John's College, Cambridge, which have been admired as so appropriate and beautiful:

“He came the cup of life to sip,
Too bitter 'twas to drain,
He put it meekly from his lip,
And went to sleep again.”

Though briefly expressed, the praise of the dead and the tenderness of the living are not left in silence. The words "sweet friend," "dearest friend," "dear and faithful companion," "candid soul," "innocent soul," "tender sister," "faithful brother," "most faithful servant of God," "constant in love and truth," are terms frequently repeated in these early crypts. The following are tender eulogiums of the dead:—

CLAUDIO BENEMERENTI STUDIOSO

QUI AMABIT ME. VIXIT. AN. P.M. XXV.

IN P.

[To Claudius, the well-deserving and studious, who loved me.
He lived twenty-five years. In peace.]

JANVARIO DULCI ET BONO

FILIO OMNIBUS

HONORIFICENTISSIMO ET

IDONEO QUI VIXIT

ANNIS XXIII. M. V. D. XXII.

PARENTES.

[To Januarius, sweet and good son, honoured and beloved by all; who lived twenty-three years, five months, and twenty-two days. His parents.]

LAVRINIA MELLE DULCIOR

QUIESC. IN PACE.

[Laurinia, sweeter than honey, sleeps in peace.]

CONSTANTIA MIRUM

PULCHRITVDINIS ATQUE

IDONITATI QUÆ VIXIT ANNIS

XVIII. MEN. VI. DIE XVI.

CONSTANTIA IN PACE.

[Constantia, mirror of beauty and amiability, who lived eighteen years, six months, and sixteen days. Constantia in peace.]

TEMPORE ADRIANI

IMPERATORIS

MARIUS ADOLESCENS DUX

MILITUM QUI SATIS VIXIT

DUM VITAM PRO XRO. CUM SAN-

. GUINE CONSUNSAT IN PACE

TANDEM QUIEVIT BENEMERENTES

CUM LACRIMIS ET METU POSVERUNT.

[In the time of the Emperor Adrian, the young Marius, a military commander, who lived long enough, as he shed his blood for Christ, and died in peace. His friends, in tears and fears, placed this stone.]

SIMPLICIO BONÆ MEMORIÆ. Q. V.

ANN. XXIII. O. XLIII.

IN PACE. FECERUNT

FRATRES.

[Simplicius, of good or happy memory, who lived twenty-three years and forty-three days. In peace. His brothers made this monument.]

Here is a short, pregnant epitaph, under which the best of men might be happy to repose:—

“On the 5th of the Kalends of November was placed here to sleep,

“Gorgonius, friend to all, and enemy to none.”*

On another tomb are these equally expressive words:—

“Maximius, who lived 23 years; friend of all men.”

Blessed, indeed, must be the memory of the men who have left us such epitaphs.

Upon a broken stone may be read the best profession of Christian resignation to the will of Heaven:—

* This inscription, like several others, is in the Greek language as well as in the Greek character. There are others where the inscriptions are Latin words in Greek characters.

“The Lord gave, and the Lord taketh away; blessed be the name of the Lord.”

The ancient Romans of the wealthy classes were incapable of this resignation: they employed skilful artists to decorate the tombs of their kindred and friends, and the sculptors commonly carved cheerful, pleasing objects on the last resting-places of the dead, or on the receptacles of the urns which merely contained their ashes: the outward, material object was even made to look joyous; but none of this joy, and no part of that resignation, visited the hearts of the bereaved survivors, who grieved without hope, and clamoured against death.

It is an improving and a holy task to contrast these submissive, hopeful epitaphs of the early Christians, with some of the inscriptions on the tombs of their unconverted predecessors or contemporaries. The Christian mother could inscribe upon the grave of her first-born that it slept in peace, or that the soul of the innocent, spotless babe had been borne away by angels: in like circumstances the Pagan mother flew out against Providence (by her called destiny or fortune), and railed at

the very gods she professed to worship. One heathen mother still cries in these crypts :—

“ O relentless Fortune, who delightest in cruel death,
Why is Maximus so suddenly snatched from me ?
He who lately used to lie joyful in my bosom,
This stone now marks his tomb—behold his sad mother !”

On another slab a despairing, embittered soul almost curses God :—

“ I, Procope, lift up my hands against the gods who snatched away me, innocent.

“ She lived 20 years. I, Proclus, set up this.”

All the inscriptions on the graves of the early martyrs are as concise as the epitaphs we have been quoting.

“ Primitius in peace, after many torments, a most valiant martyr. He lived 38 years, more or less. His wife raised this to her dearest husband, the well-deserving.”

“ Here lies Gordianus, deputy of Gaul, who was executed for the faith, with all his family : they rest in peace. Theophila, a handmaid, set up this.”

Towards the end of the fourth century the epitaphs became more diffuse ; but still those

of the martyrs appear generally to have retained their concise, modest character.

“Paulus was put to death in tortures, in order that he might live in eternal bliss.”

“Clementia, tortured, dead, sleeps: will rise.”

“Lannus, Christ’s martyr, rests here. He suffered under Diocletian.”

In this last inscription there is a small square spot lined off, having in it these three letters—

“E. P. S.”

The letters mean “*Et posteris suis*”—“And to his successors.” The martyr Lannus had left children and relatives, who, in setting up the inscription, were looking forward to the days when they would be laid by his side. The same initials “E. P. S.” are found in very many inscriptions. Other epitaphs record that the wife has been gathered to the husband, the child to the mother, the brother to the brother; or that those who were brothers in the faith, and bosom friends in life, are laid side by side in the same grave.

In other instances a number of friends inscribe on the tombstone their intention of

being buried, when their hours shall come, in the same vault or large grave to which they have consigned a friend who has gone before them. Thus,—“ Julia, Claudia, and Elia, have secured their places here, by the side of their sweet friend Calpurnia, who rests in peace.”

In the following epitaph (probably of the fourth century) a fond husband mourns his bereavement, but does not grieve as those to whom the heavenly hope has been denied.

“ This grief will always weigh upon me : may it be granted me to behold in sleep your revered countenance. My wife Albana, always chaste and modest, I am left alone to my cares. Our Divine Author gave you to me as a sacred boon. You, well-deserving one, having left your relations, lie in peace,—from sleep, you will arise,—a temporary rest is granted you. She lived forty-five years, five months, and thirteen days : buried in peace. Placus, her husband, set up this.”

Here is the inscription on the tomb of a martyr, who suffered about A.D. 160. For such a subject it is unusually long, but its sentiments are beautiful :—

“ Alexander, dead is not, but lives above the

stars, and his body rests in this tomb. He ended his life under the emperor Antonine, who, foreseeing that great benefit would result from his services, returned evil for good. For, while on his knees, and about to sacrifice to the true God, he was led away to execution. O sad times! in which, among sacred rites and prayers, even in caverns, we are not safe. What can be more wretched than such a life? and what than such a death? When they cannot be buried by their friends and relations; at length they sparkle in heaven. He has scarcely lived who has lived in Christian times.”

On not a few of the stones, anathemas are pronounced against such impious men as shall dare disturb the sanctity of the grave.

MALE PEREAT INSEPVLTVS
JACEAT NON RESVRGAT
CVM JVDA PARTEM HABEAT
SI QVIS SEPVLCRVN HVNC VIOLAVERIT.

[May he perish badly, and, deprived of sepulture, may he lie dead and never rise; may he share lots with Judas, he who violates this sepulchre.]

The reader will remember the inscription on

the tomb of Shakspeare, in the old church at Stratford-upon-Avon, beginning,

“Good friends, for Jesu’s sake forbear,”

and ending with

“Accurst be he who moves these stones.”

These lines were certainly not written (as some have pretended they were) by the great poet. It was a stereotyped form, a quatrain very generally adopted before Shakspeare’s time, and, occasionally, used long after his time, in the same way that the Latin curse we have just quoted from the inscriptions in the catacombs of Rome was reproduced, word for word, or very slightly altered, during several successive ages.

Many curious inscriptions mention the purchase of the graves or burying-places.

“I Saturninus have purchased from Sixtus a place of two tombs, for two pieces of solid gold, under the great luminary (lamp or light), where lies interred she who was with her husband forty years.”

“Timotheus purchased this place of twelve

graves—S. E. P. S.” (*Sibi et posteris suis*) ; *i. e.*, for himself and his posterity.

That the celibacy of the priesthood was not insisted upon in the early ages of the Roman Church, is proved by many inscriptions, which mention the wives, daughters, or other children of men in holy orders.

“The place of Basil the presbyter, and his wife Felicitas.”

“The once happy daughter of the presbyter Gabinus ; here is Susanna joined with her father in peace.”

“My wife Laurentia made me this tomb : she was ever suited to my disposition, venerable and faithful. At length disappointed envy lies crushed. The Bishop Leo survived his eightieth year.”

“Petronia, a deacon’s wife, the type of modesty. In this place I laid my bones ; spare your tears, dear husband and daughters, and believe that it is forbidden to weep for one who lives in God. Buried in peace, on the 3rd before the Nones of October, in the consulate of Festus.”

It has been observed, that this inscription is

one of many which are rendered particularly valuable, by bearing the names of the consuls at the time they were executed, and thus affording data for ascertaining their epoch. By this means we learn, that Petronia, a deacon's wife, was interred in the latter part of the fifth century, or in A.D. 472.

The language of the inscriptions is no doubt the colloquial Latin in use among the people in those times. In very many instances it makes a close approach to modern Italian, resembling that living language rather than the dead language of classical antiquity. Both grammar and orthography are frequently very defective. One mood or tense of a verb is often used for another. Occasionally the cases of nouns are strangely confounded. Sometimes the use of the accusative is quite lost. The orthography is often curious. The letter B is generally substituted for the letter V. Thus, on innumerable tombs *vixit* is written *bixit*. Z is just as frequently used for J—*Zesu* for *Jesu*. Not unfrequently, the declension of nouns almost disappears, the cases being made out by prepositions, as in Italian, French, English, and

most other modern languages. Even to the philologist the catacombs afford an interesting field of study.

In many of the tombs of the martyrs were found implements of torture; pincers, nails, chains, and the like. In a chapel of St. Peter's Church, in Rome, they show a horrible instrument, called "the iron fingers:" it is made in the form of a hand, with the fingers curved, as if to squeeze, and the nails of the fingers are long, sharp steel points. The laceration inflicted by this horrible tool of torture must have been exquisite! In other tombs were found large, heavy stones, such as were used in drowning the Christians in the days of persecution. This appears to have been a very common method of inflicting death: the stone was fastened round the neck of the martyr, his hands were tied behind him, and he was hurled into the Tiber.

But other and far more agreeable objects have reposed within these sarcophagi, or upon them, and are now to be found in great numbers in the Vatican Museum. Foremost among these may be named the sepulchral

lamps, mostly of terra-cotta, but sometimes of bronze, and many of them of curious and even beautiful workmanship. The handle of these small lamps is often made in the form of a cross, with sometimes a dove resting upon it. The body of the lamp is almost invariably in the shape of a ship or bark, one of the earliest and most popular symbols of the Church. In one of them, St. Peter is seated at the helm, St. Paul stands at the prow, and a mast rises in the middle, with the inscription,—DOMINUS LEGEM DAT. Most frequently they bear the monogram of Christ, and no other figure or symbol. Some are ornamented with the palm-branch, or olive crown, or the figure of the lamb, or that of the dove. Before the hand of the spoiler came upon them, the total number of lamps in this dark subterranean world, must have been prodigious. Without their light and the light of torches, there was no celebrating divine worship, there was no moving either processionally or otherwise, in these crypts. “With torches,” says St. Jerome,—“with torches of wax and with lamps, and with a chorus of psalms, they carry the dead to the

tomb.” What was a local necessity with these early Christians became a consecrated usage with their successors ; and hence, in all Roman Catholic countries, lighted torches of wax are still carried at funerals, although they take place in broad daylight. By the side of these lamps were usually small terra-cotta vases for the oil which had fed the lamps. In some instances there was a verbal reference to the parable of the Wise Virgins ; in others was this inscription,—

“ *Quasi lucernæ lucenti in caliginoso loco.*”

[Like a lamp shining in a dark place.]

At times, the skeleton of some personage was found, wrapped in a robe of golden tissue, or of other rich materials, which had resisted time and decay ; at other times, a small fillet of gold was found round the head ; at others, embroidered slippers were found on the feet.

Domestic utensils, or vessels used in church ceremonies, as chalices, or sacramental cups, pateræ, salvers, common drinking-cups, dishes, mirrors, ivory combs, or combs made of the enduring boxwood, were discovered in many of

the graves. Du Cange and other ecclesiastical writers bear testimony to the fact that combs formed part of the holy furnishing of the primitive church, on account of the custom of the ministers of religion always to comb out their hair before they approached the altar. But, as in the pagan tombs of Pompeii, female adornments, as ear-rings, bracelets, necklaces, rings, brooches, have been found in abundance in these Christian tombs, together with nearly all the little trinkets and utensils of the female toilet-table, not excepting toothpicks and ear-cleaners, of ivory, or of some metal. Scent-bottles, and bronze boxes made to contain perfumes, figure in the list; but the rouge-pot and the jar for cosmetics seem to be missing.* The long pin of silver or of ivory, which the ladies of antiquity used to support their back hair, and which is still employed for the same

* Both the latter have been found in Pompeii. Had we not other proofs that the ladies of pagan antiquity were much addicted to face-painting, the fact would be established by articles preserved in that department of the Museo Borbonico, at Naples, which contains the treasures dug out of Pompeii, Herculaneum, and Stabia.

purpose by the female peasants of a large portion of Southern Italy, has been found in many of the graves: one end of it is usually carved into the form of a female head, with the hair dressed in the fashion of the ladies of ancient Rome.

In some of the graves of the young were dolls, marionettes, and other playthings of childhood. As nearly all the sorts of objects here enumerated have been found in the last dwelling-places of Greeks, Etruscans, and Romans, the Christians probably only followed an established usage—a traditional ancient custom, in which they saw nothing obnoxious to their own tenets; but the learned and pious Boldetti conjectured that in thus decorating the tombs of their kindred and friends with so many objects, the early believers were guided by that motive of hope which led them to consider the grave as a place of passage, and death as a peaceful sleep, on the bosom of which it might not be indifferent to the deceased to be surrounded by the objects, or by some image of the objects, which had been familiar and dear to them in this life. “It

is in conformity with this idea," says a recent French writer, "of decorating, furnishing, and, as it were, animating the tomb with painting and sculpture, of lighting it up with lamps, of filling it with everything that might render its aspect less sad and desolate:—a simple and touching idea which had inspired profane antiquity, but which Christianity had purified and elevated in giving it a holier principle, and in disengaging it from every sensual view;—it is by this predominant idea alone that we can explain the general system of decoration in these Christian sepulchres, and understand its several elements."*

Another conjecture is, that relatives and friends, on taking the last look of the deceased—before the marble slab closed and concealed them—took a melancholy delight in depositing some object, dear to themselves, in the grave. Medals and ancient Roman coins of gold or silver, cameos, intaglios, and other engraved or precious stones, were often found in the sarcophagi, as were also signet-rings, with

* Raoul Rochette. "Catacombes de Rome."

different devices, as if they had belonged to different owners. But for the irruption of the barbarians into the catacombs, no doubt many more of these precious objects would have been found; but in spite of their plunder, enough has been discovered to form an important contribution to Numismatic and other collections. These coins and medals (some of them of great antiquity, and others of the best periods of Roman art) are almost invariably in an admirable state of preservation. From the dryness and unchangeableness of the atmosphere, these graves and catacombs were well suited to preserve the objects which were committed to their custody.

By the sides of many of the graves have been found small phials let into the wall, and fixed there with plaster. Many have never been removed, but remain fixed, as they originally were, in the tufo-wall or side of the crypt. It is believed that each of these phials contained some of the blood of a martyr; and traces of a matter resembling dry blood are often visible, adhering to the sides of the vessel. It is well known, from the old fathers, the mar-

tyrologies, and the lines of Prudentius, that the early Christians were ever most anxious to obtain some relics of the martyrs, and that they often rushed, at the great risk of their own lives, into the gory circus or amphitheatre, to dip sponges, handkerchiefs, or small pateræ into the blood which had been shed for the testimony of Christ. These vessels are of various materials—terra cotta, glass, agate, and (more rarely) of bronze or brass.

Many of the small dishes or pateræ, of agate or enamel, found inside the tombs, are believed to have preserved some drops of the blood of those who died for the truth.

Both phials and pateræ are frequently enamelled, or otherwise ornamented with foliage, fruits, figures, and other devices: at times the designs appear to be in the taste of the second or third century; but, not rarely, the style must be referred to Pagan Rome, or to the remoter era of the Etruscans. The most valuable of these relics are to be seen in the Vatican Museum, and the Museum of the Collegio Romano, where phials and pateræ exist in great numbers; but specimens are to be found in

very many of the churches, not only in other cities of Italy, but also in other continental countries; for, during the seventeenth century, all such relics were in great demand, and princes, as well as bishops and priests, were eager to be possessed of them, purchased them at high prices, and conveyed them to their several homes and countries.

Many of these small vessels may have contained the milk and honey which the early Christians were accustomed to minister in baptism. I have seen some of them ornamented with figures of bees, and several that were made in the form of a beehive. The total number of them must have been prodigious; for although so many have been carried off during the last three centuries, many are still found in almost every place where a little trouble is taken to dig into the earth or crumbling tufo.

It has been well said, that these Roman catacombs are analogous to the Necropolis of Thebes and Memphis, and the Latomiæ of ancient Syracuse, but richer in objects and in variety, more suggestive of improving thoughts, and, to a Christian antiquary, artist,

or simple believer, far more interesting than they. To such, the gloom is broken by the light that is of heaven.

Nor are all the old monkish legends attached to the spots, of a saddening or gloomy character. The death of the martyr is the most glorious of all deaths. Faith looked not to the rack and wheel, the stake and the consuming fire, but to the opening heaven ready to receive the parting soul. The memory of such a death was as joyous as the death itself was glorious. It strung men's hearts to heroism; it gave them both fortitude and courage—fortitude to endure the evils of this life, with all the injuries and torments man might inflict upon them, and courage to encounter death under whatsoever form it might present itself. With these feelings, they ornamented their graves with flowers, and fruits, and cheering objects, and wrote up everywhere the blessed word, Peace! Peace! and with these feelings the martyrologists often wrote in a joyous, jubilant strain.

The days of persecution rolled on to their end; the "indignation" *was* overpast; there

was no longer need to shut the door, and to hide in the inner chambers. Then, the legends and traditions connected with this nether world altogether lost their dismal character. The gloom of the crypts was broken by rays and broad beams of light and glory, and the mournful silence of the tomb gave way to shouts of gladness and of Christian triumph. By steps, gradual, yet not slow, faith prevailed over paganism. Every oracle waxed dumb except that which spoke the Word. The persecutors became worshippers, and wept and prayed at the tombs of those heroic professors, whom they, or their forefathers, had put to cruel deaths. The decencies, the decorum, the simple solemnity, the spiritual cheerfulness of the early Christians, who had been so long misrepresented as sour, gloomy fanatics, practising abominable, secret, and even atrocious rites, won upon hearts which felt that their own creeds were, indeed, outworn; their places of worship became frequented,—

“And those who went to scoff remain’d to pray.”

One of the last legends of this period, inte-

resting in itself, becomes more so to the scholar, from its connection with a locality endeared by the undying verses of Horace:—

“Vides, ut altâ stet nive candidum
Soracte.”

[See'st thou how white Soracte stands
Under deep snow.]

Constantine and the tyrant Maxentius were contending for the empire of Rome; and the issue seemed, as yet, uncertain to most men. Should Maxentius prevail, there would be a new and bloody persecution. The catacombs were now far too well known as the resorts, tombs, and narrow temples, of the Christians, to afford the remotest chance of concealment or sanctuary. The good bishop St. Silvester had retired from the city, at a time when it was much doubted whether he could safely abide in it or not. Some of his clergy had followed him, and, with his little flock, he lived in the caverns of Mount Soracte, that famed eminence, which is seen from the mouths of the catacombs, as from every part of the city, towering at a distance over the Campania, or

long, wide plain of Rome, and which, as in the days of the ancient poet, is mantled with snow in the winter season. One day the bishop beheld a party of armed men, who were climbing the steep paths of the mountain, and who seemed to be searching for some person in the desert place. He fully believed that the soldiers were bringing to him the crown of martyrdom; and he made ready to die. He said to the priests who were with him, "Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation." The armed men, without explanation, conducted the bishop to Rome, and there led him into the presence of the emperor Constantine, who had seen the vision of the cross in the sky, and had just routed the pagan Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge, which crosses the Tiber to the south of the city; and, in a few days, the dweller in the caves of Mount Soracte had his abode in the imperial palace of the Lateran, which the emperor made over to the pope.

To complete the account of this unexpected and stupendous revolution, we are told, in the Latin Acts of the same St. Silvester, that the

emperor Constantine convoked, in the forum of Trajan, a solemn assembly of the Roman people, and there published one of the most solemn proclamations that history has recorded. It was the Christian coronation of the new world. "The fatal divisions of men's minds," said the victorious emperor, "can never have a fortunate end, so long as no ray of the pure light reaches the darkness of their ignorance. It is necessary for the eyes of men's minds to be opened. In this manner must die out the error of idolatry. Let us renounce the old superstition, and adore the one Lord who reigns in Heaven. As for ourselves, be it known to all men, that we have utterly renounced this error, by the means of Christ our God. For the rest, not to detain you longer, we will briefly declare the regulations we feel bound to make. We direct that churches be opened for the Christians, in such wise that the ministers of the Christian law may enjoy the same privileges which have been conferred on the priests of the temples. And that all the Roman world may know that we bow the head before the true God,—before Christ, we have

undertaken to build in his honour a church within the precincts of our palace itself. This will give proof to the whole world that there no longer remains in our heart any doubt, or any vestige of our ancient error. And although we have not the slightest intention of forcing any one to become a Christian, yet we do not conceal that we shall be united by a closer friendship with all those who, spontaneously, and of their own accord, embrace Christianity.”

Wars, invasions of barbarians, famine, plague, pestilence, fires, inundations, and all earthly woes beset the capital of the Christian world after the religious revolution thus completed by Constantine; but from this period the great principles of our faith remained undisturbed and dominant.

That glorious Cross that blazed upon the sky,
And fix'd of Constantine the doubting eye,
While the world's empire yet suspensive hung,
And every nerve to energy was strung;
While Tiber, awed, restrain'd his onward flood,
Soon to be swell'd with death and human blood,
While anxious thousands on the Aventine,
Tarpeian Rock and honour'd Palatine,

From the *Seven Hills*, from Capitol and fane,
Look out, with flashing eyes, across the plain,
And voices, hazarded in wild surmise,
As banners disappear or banners rise,
Shout "Victory! Maxentius gains the day!"
"No! Constantine is victor, *Evoê!*"
That Cross descended from the realm above,
To fix on earth its roots with endless love;
No more to leave us, never more to wend,
Till earth shall be no more, and time itself shall end!

The name of Soracte was changed into that of Mount St. Silvester—Monte San Silvestro, in modern Italian. It had been sacred to Apollo, and a temple to the god had stood on the summit. The temple gave place to a Christian church, the caverns were converted into oratories, and the rugged ascents were dotted with white chapels. According to the great Dante, who followed some old legend, Constantine prayed, on Mount Soracte, to be delivered from a serious malady by which he was afflicted.* The mountain is still held in great veneration.

Let us conclude this chapter with a passage

* *Inferno*, canto xxvii. The poet also repeats the story with a *dicunt*, or "they say," in his prose treatise, "*De Monarchiâ*."

from the sublimest of all Italian poets—a passage which is morally applicable to the state of the Christian world on the cessation of its long persecutions.

“Come rimane splendido e sereno
L’emispero dell’aere, quando soffia
Borea, dalla guancia ond’è più leno,
Perchè si purga e risolve la roffia,
Che pria turbava, sì che ’l ciel ne ride,
Con le bellezze d’ogni sua paroffia.” *

[As when the north blows from his milder cheek
A blast, that scours the sky, forthwith our air,
Clear’d of the rack that hung on it before,
Glitters ; and, with its beauties all unveil’d,
The firmament looks forth serene, and smiles.]

Cary’s Translation.

* Paradiso, canto xxviii.

BOOK V.

RECENT DISCOVERIES.

“Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken.”

Isaiah.

EARLY in the year 1850, the artists and *savants* of Paris were excited by reports that many of their countrymen, with the army at Rome, were taking a very great interest in the catacombs, and that a French architect of reputation had made very important discoveries in that subterranean world. The interest and curiosity, especially of those engaged in the study of Christian art, were at their height when, shortly after, M. Perret, the architect in question, returned to Paris with his valuable collection of plans and drawings. For once, the expectation of even the most sanguine was not disappointed. Monuments and fragments of the earliest Christian architecture,

paintings in fresco and painting on glass, mosaics, vases, lamps, inscriptions, and symbols, engraved on the tombstones, were all found in M. Perret's portfolio, which included more than five hundred drawings of objects which had never been designed, or at least never published, before.

This collection was not only precious in the quantity of its objects, in the importance of each of its objects, and the novelty of the greater part of them; it had been formed upon a method and a well-considered system, which greatly augmented its value. In fact, M. Perret had left France for Rome with a fixed plan, had commenced his researches with one determinate object, and had kept that object constantly in view. Obeying that impulse or remarkable movement which, of late years, has carried the students of history to substitute facts for conjectures, and to trace all things to their real origin, M. Perret, entirely devoted to the study of Christian art, was resolved to go as far back into the past as was possible; and it was in the depths of the catacombs, and

in the crypts which had not yet been explored by any modern artist or antiquarian, that he could best seek for the most ancient monuments of certain dates. He devoted six years of his life to the catacombs and their contents—six years of constant and hard labour, during which he was, in a manner, buried alive in these dark crypts. His difficulties were numerous, and his dangers not a few. Several times his heart failed him, and he thought of giving up his enterprise. His guides and workmen, terrified at seeing unknown spaces opening before them, and lengthening on all sides in new and deep underground galleries, hesitated, stopped, and refused to accompany him into crypts and labyrinths where they might lose their way,—an accident which happened to them on several occasions. It was only by promises of money, by his own example and perseverance, that M. Perret could overcome the very natural repugnance of these poor men. At other times, his progress was stopped by the earth and tufo which had fallen in, and which must be cleared away before he could

explore the rest of the crypt. Then, as he advanced, the earth might fall in again, and stop his retreat. In some places, water was filtering through the roof, and fragments of the roof were frequently descending. In other places, in the lowest or fourth tier, where the crypts, some eighty or ninety feet beneath the surface of the earth, were never visited by a change of air, he was met by an atmosphere which extinguished his torches, and threatened him and his people with suffocation. The Italian artists and copyists he employed (he could not do everything with his own hands), not being animated by his enthusiasm, grew tired of working by torchlight and the light of lamps, and leading the life of a miner or troglodyte, and often hesitated to accompany him in his dangerous and seemingly interminable excursions. At times, when, by toiling and digging, he had made the discovery of the face of a wall covered with paintings, Time, the destroyer, seemed to enter into the struggle against him, and it was only at the cost of infinite fatigues, delicate experiments, and a

marvellous patience, that he succeeded in removing the thick veil of dust and nitre which covered the painting.

There were other difficulties of a very serious character. Above all things, M. Perret desired that the drawings should be correct delineations of the originals, strictly and most scrupulously *true*, without any mixture of modern improvements or modern conventionalities. Nothing was to be altered, nothing corrected, whether in incorrect drawing, in defective grouping, or in false perspective; everything was to be copied faithfully, simply, without any addition or subtraction, and defects and deformities were to be reproduced with as much care as beauties. Now this unvarying fidelity, this fidelity above and in spite of everything else, this renouncing all that one knows, this losing one's own age to live in the remote past, and to identify oneself, as it were, with the earliest Christian art, are qualities most difficult to find in any artist. Thus, a faithful, simple copyist is as rare as a faithful, good translator. M. Perret was, however, so fortunate as to

associate in his undertaking M. Savinien Petit, an artist who had all the requisite and rare qualities, and who partook of his own enthusiasm.

M. Petit's designs are said to possess all the interest of a perfect truthfulness, and to be devoid of every kind of exaggeration. Connoisseurs, who have seen them at Paris in M. Perret's portfolio, have been beyond measure delighted with them. None of the drawings previously engraved and published in the works of Bosio, Bottari, and D'Agincourt, can be at all compared with these; for in them the artists gave the tastes of their own several ages to almost everything they touched, and kept altering and improving, until they improved away all the antique character of their originals. There are exceptions, but they are few.

The entire collection comprises three hundred and sixty drawings, of which one hundred and fifty-four are copies of frescos, sixty-five are drawings of monuments, and eighty-six are copies of paintings on glass, and forty-one are representations of lamps, vases, rings, instru-

ments of martyrdoms, etc. In addition to these drawings, there are copies of the inscriptions of more than five hundred tombs. Of the one hundred and fifty-four frescos, most of which are of the first ages of the Church, more than two-thirds have never been copied before, while a certain number of them have been discovered only between the years 1840 and 1850. Among the last must be mentioned the paintings of the celebrated well or cave of Platonía, which for a time is said to have been the tomb of St. Peter and St. Paul, and which Pope Damasus, about the year 365, caused to be ornamented with frescos. For many ages this cavity had been filled up, but, being authorized so to do by the Roman government, M. Perret completely cleared it out, and had the satisfaction of discovering paintings which represent our Saviour and the Apostles, and two tombs or sarcophagi of Parian marble, which he believes to have contained at one time the bodies of Peter and Paul. Some may doubt his conclusions as to matters of dogma or of tradition, but few will deny to this laborious,

conscientious, right-minded French architect, the praise due to one who has supplied some missing and important links in the chain of the history of Christian art.

The copies of the paintings on glass are described as singularly interesting. This painted glass is not like the painted panes of glass which enrich the windows of so many of our cathedrals and old churches, and which give that dim, religious light so favourable to devotion and inward concentration. The catacomb painted glasses are medallions encrusted in the walls or attached to the bottom of funereal vases. In many instances the designs or pictures are traced upon gold, which is either fused and incorporated with the glass, or fixed on the surface like enamel.

Most of the numerous inscriptions which have been copied, belong to the four first centuries of the Christian era. The vases and lamps have never been drawn before, and appear to differ materially from those published by M. Perret's predecessors. The terracottas, though few in number, are of great

price; among them is a large medallion representing in bold rilievo a head, with a beard, a work said to be of a marvellous character, finished like a cameo, and pure as the purest antique.

As an architect, M. Perret could not be indifferent to the forms of the crypts, oratories, and baptisteries. Of these he has made several remarkable drawings. Judging by the capitals and bases of columns, and by other architectural details, one would be disposed to believe that they were long posterior to the tenth century; but M. Perret and other antiquarians believe that they belong to the fifth century. When these architectural drawings are engraved and published, they will show in a striking light how closely the first church-builders aboveground adhered to the plans and ideas of the subterrene excavators, and how much of the forms and ceremonies, not only of the early, but of the present Christian church, are borrowed and repeated from the Roman catacombs.

It is to be hoped that we shall not be kept

waiting long for the appearance of M. Perret's work. With a liberality and a promptitude that do it honour, the French government, though involved at the time in the troubles and embarrassments of revolutions, obtained a parliamentary vote of 180,814 francs to cover the expenses of engraving, printing, etc. The National Assembly (now no more) must share in the honour; for, split into factions as it was, and coarse and violent as some of its factions indisputably were, it voted readily, and almost unanimously, the money required. Our own governments, whether old Tory or old Whig, or new Whig or Conservative, have very rarely shown any such zeal and generosity, and our House of Commons, however composed, and however quiet and prosperous the state of the country, seems always determined to resist or niggardly cut down any such grants. Ministers and members act as if all art and all literature must be conducted upon the commercial principle, and upon none other; and as there are many works which cannot possibly be produced upon that principle, and as booksellers cannot

be expected to publish that which will not *pay*, or render a quick return of profit, so many treasures are constantly lying buried in this wealthiest of all countries, and drawings and manuscripts, which would enlighten and improve the age, are denied publicity. By the same reasons, many books, which ought to be written, and which are essential to our national literature and to our national honour, are never undertaken at all, because they cannot be conducted on the commercial principle, or upon any arrangement between author and bookseller.

If the various fortunate conditions of literary ability, literary research, industry, perseverance, and worldly *wealth*, were more commonly united in one person, the evil would not be of such magnitude; but the great majority of laborious literary men are notoriously *poor*. For *light* literature,—and for none other,—there is a sufficient popular demand to pay expenses, and to leave, occasionally, very considerable profits. For such commodity publishers are easily found; but the oldest and highest houses will tell you

that they cannot undertake a serious work of any length, unless the author can pay, or find security for, paper, printing, cloth-binding, and the heavy expenses of advertising.

Such is, in the midst of much uninformed boasting about the encouragement and support accorded to letters, the real state of our literary market in 1852! For this, let no one blame the publishers and dealers in books, who are no more bound to trade at a loss than are the dealers in any other species of goods. Where trade of necessity stops, it is for the State to act.

The late French monarch, Louis Philippe, at the instigation of M. Guizot, devoted, in a series of years, many hundred thousands of francs for the collection, editing, and publication of old materials and documents relating to French history, the minister of Public Instruction disposing of the funds, under the direction of a committee, composed of fifty members of the several French academies or learned societies, who had power to examine and decide on the works proposed for their approval.

This annual guerdon afforded employment and encouragement to many literary men, and their labours, though not yet completed, have rendered some of the best materials for their national annals accessible to the student, in portable and cheap books. We would not revive the mournful story of our late Record Commission, which, during a period of a quarter of a century, spent half a million, not of francs, but of pounds sterling, and left us little for our money but ponderous, expensive, unreadable, terrific, and for the most part utterly useless folios. We would merely remind parliament and the country, that, with the richest materials of national history possessed by any people in the world, we have not yet so much as a good catalogue of the contents of our invaluable collections.

The king of Sardinia, the late unfortunate Charles Albert, followed the example of Louis Philippe, and the princes of other and still smaller states have allotted funds for the same honourable purposes; but England, with a vast empire extending to all parts of the world, has done, and is doing, nothing in this way.

Is literature yet to be left, in this country, without any of that *national* encouragement which every civilized state ought to take pride in bestowing? Is the spirit of the trader and huckster to regulate for ever the rewards of intellect?

Is it for ever to remain a reproach to representative systems of government, that every little work undertaken by such government, whether for public utility, for literature, for science, or for art, must be controlled almost wholly by parliamentary interest, and converted into a job?

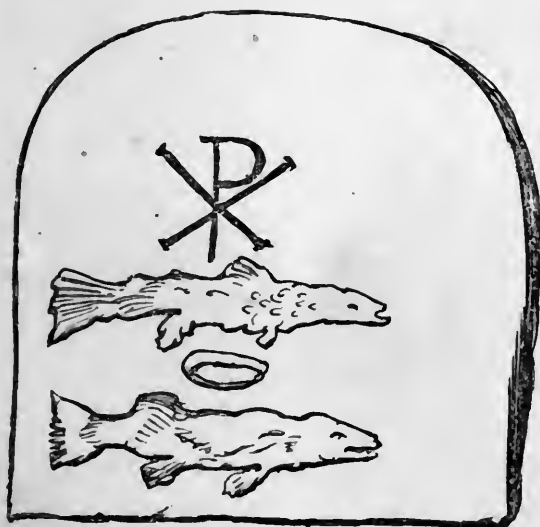
SOME SPECIMENS FROM THE CATACOMBS.



The common Monogram.



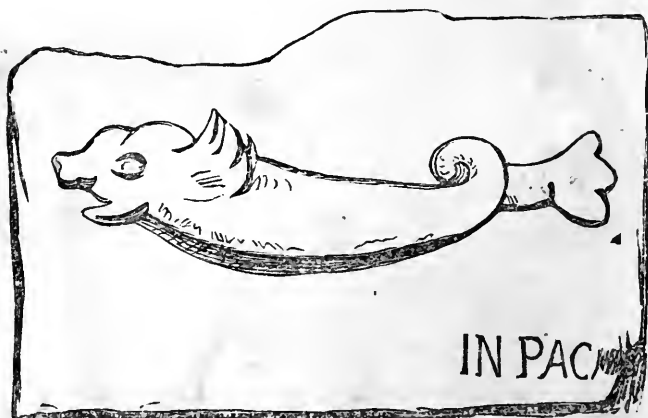
Laurel Crown of Martyrdom.



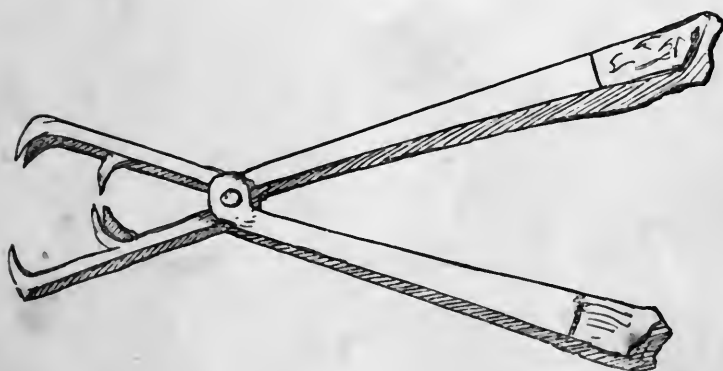
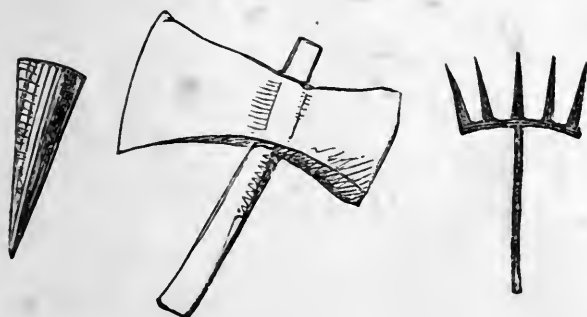
Monogram and Fish.



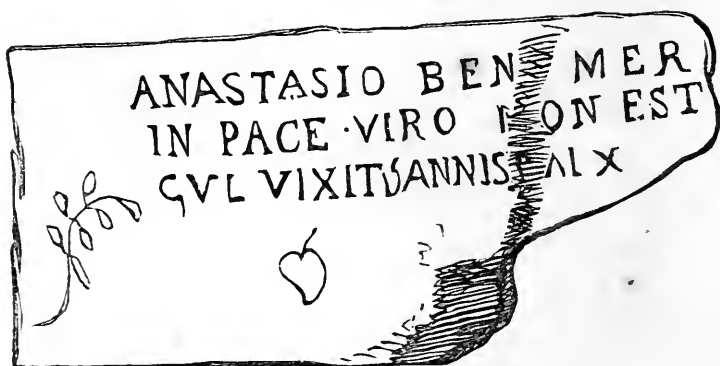
Ancient Grave-Digger.



The Dolphin.



Instruments of Torture found in the Catacombs.



Fragments of Monumental Inscriptions.

LOCVS TIMOTHEI
ET PAULINÆ

HOC EST
SEPVLCRVM SANCTÆ
LVCINÆ VIRGINIS

IN SOMNO
PACIS



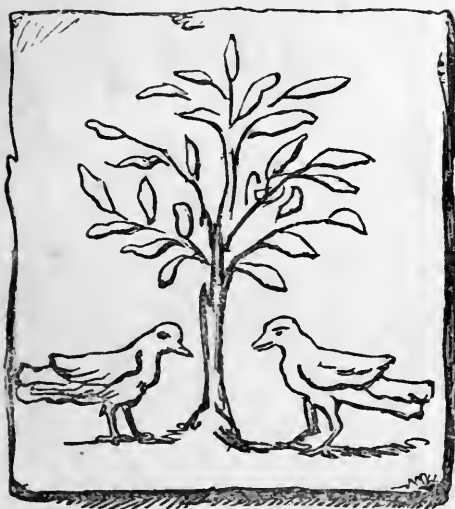
From one of the earliest Tombs.



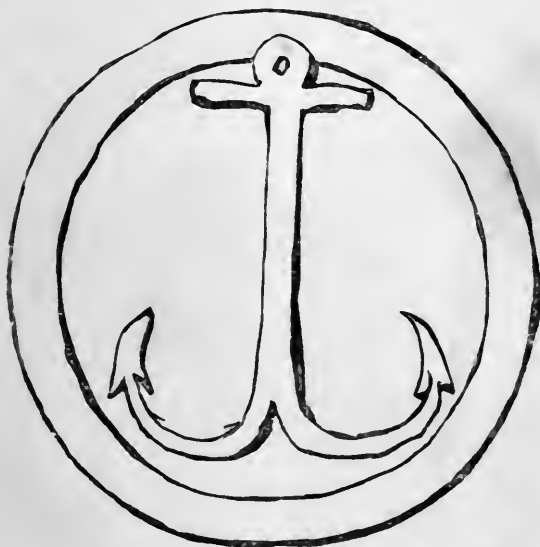
From the Grave of a Lady.



Palm of Martyrdom.



From the Grave of a Lady.

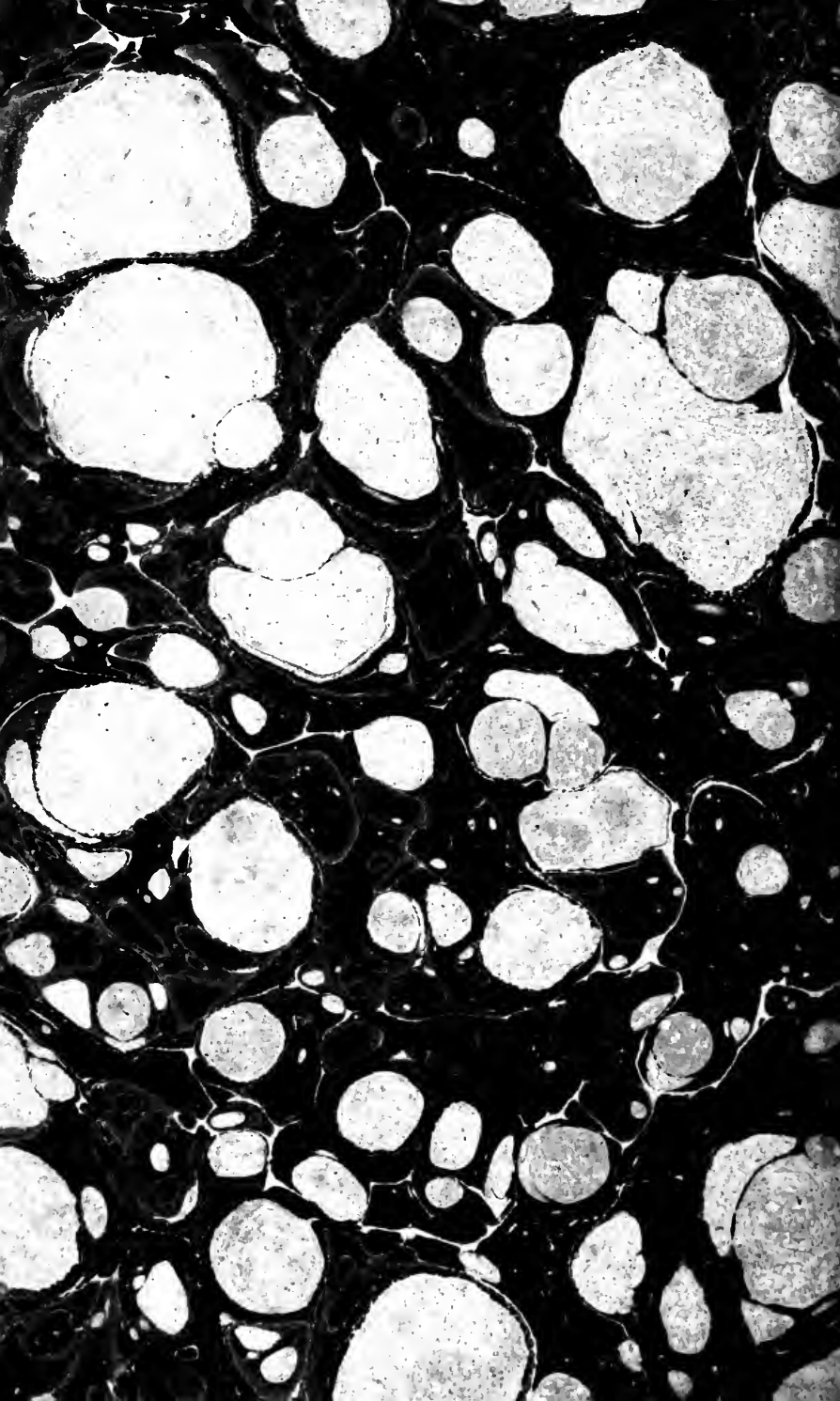


Anchor of Hope and Salvation.

PRINTED BY
COX (BROTHERS) AND WYMAN, GREAT QUEEN STREET,
LINCOLN'S-INN FIELDS.







ss of Rome.

• 24485

MacFarlane, C. - Catacombs of Rome.

PONTIFICAL INSTITUTE
OF MEDIAEVAL STUDIES
59 QUEEN'S PARK
TORONTO 5. CANADA

• 24485

